

PROVIDING EFFECTIVE PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELING  
IN A GROWING CONGREGATION THROUGH SHARED MINISTRY MODELS

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presented to  
the Faculty of the  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Ministry

by

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## ABSTRACT

### Providing Effective Pastoral Care and Counseling in a Growing Congregation Through Shared Ministry Models

by

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The problem addressed by this project is the difficulty faced by a minister of a growing congregation in providing effective pastoral care and counseling when the church that she or he is serving has reached a size where the minister can no longer provide for all those needs without assistance. According to Arlin Rothauge and Alice Mann, that transition is defined by what they have called growth into a "program size" congregation, characterized by Sunday morning attendance of 150 to 400, including children and youth.

Although Rothauge and Mann write a great deal about the changing structure of the "program size" congregation, they spend very little time addressing the topic of pastoral care and counseling. This project indicates specific ways in which the minister can deal with the increased need for and stress from trying to provide pastoral care and counseling in a "program size" congregation. This project argues that a shared ministry of pastoral care and counseling can best be provided through Lay Ministry, Neighborhood Networks, and Covenant Groups, in addition to the minister's pastoral counseling and his or her referrals of congregants to mental health care professionals.

This project is based in a Unitarian Universalist theology and is supported by field research in Unitarian Universalist congregations in Southern California in

order to provide a practical context for the theoretical background, but the material included could certainly be adapted to serve the needs of those in other faith traditions as well. The content is also viewed through the lens of an ethical perspective so that the implementation of a shared ministry of pastoral care and counseling within a congregation can be shown to have integrity beyond its strictly pragmatic applications.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

### The Problem

Taken from my experience as the minister of a suburban Unitarian Universalist congregation in Southern California, the problem addressed in this project is the difficulty of providing effective pastoral care and counseling in a congregation that has grown to a “program size,” in which the minister alone is no longer able to meet the pastoral care and counseling needs of the increased number of members in the congregation that she or he is serving.

### Importance of This Problem

My awareness of this problem began about three years ago when the congregation I serve had come close to reaching what Arlin Rothauge<sup>1</sup>, and later Alice Mann from the Alban Institute, call “program size” - approximately 150 people, including children and youth, at Sunday morning worship.<sup>2</sup> At that time I became acutely aware that I could no longer provide for the pastoral care and counseling needs in the same way that I had previously done, and it was a change that made me wonder whether this congregation was the one where I should continue to serve. After all, pastoral care and counseling with individuals in the congregation was something that I found incredibly meaningful and satisfying. As a result I went through a period of discernment in my life and ministry that led me to the present and my understanding that I must find a new

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<sup>1</sup> Arlin J. Rothauge, Sizing Up a Congregation for New Member Ministry (New York: Seabury Professional Services, 1983), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Alice Mann, The In-Between Church (Herndon, Va: Alban Institute, 1998), 17.

way of providing pastoral care and counseling that is fulfilling for me and the congregation that I am serving.

Part of that time of transition for me is reflected in the following segment from a newsletter article that I wrote in May of 2002.

A great deal has been said about the fact that our congregation has now changed in size from what church analyst Alice Mann has called a 'pastoral' church . . . to a 'program' church . . . And we can be justifiably proud of the way in which we have made that transition, one that, according to all the literature, is very challenging. Our Board has guided us with skill and grace, and the newly rejuvenated Council has made real strides in enhancing the communication and shared organization of our committee structure. In addition, we are continuing to develop new programs and religious education opportunities to accommodate the needs of our burgeoning community. Our generosity in sharing our time, talents, and money has also continued to grow along with our numbers; and our worship services and music are getting excellent reviews. And the list goes on.

So, with all of these positive developments, why should we be concerned? Well, for my part, I have come to realize that all of this growth will have an effect on the way that I am able to do ministry. With our increase in activities, I will have to start prioritizing my time differently; and I will have to ask others to help me. For example, I will be able to participate in only some of the social action projects, committee meetings, and social events that I would like to attend; and I will need help in facilitating the increased number of adult religious education classes. In addition, more of the personal visits to our growing number of members and friends will have to be shared by the Caring Network and the Lay Ministers. I will also need to sharpen my focus on Sunday morning worship, the time when the largest number of people are in attendance, to insure its continuing excellence. At least those are the things that the research tells us.

However, we are a group of people who share this community; so I need your help. Please let me know your thoughts and feelings about the ways that I can most effectively serve you and our growing congregation. This is an exciting time, and I feel energized by the opportunities ahead. Let me know what your hopes and dreams are for this ministry that we are sharing. How can we in this religious community share our Unitarian Universalist

values and make our world a better place together? I look forward to hearing from you.”

Blessings,  
Rev. Betty (signature)

That article was my first public expression of my struggle to understand my changed role in a growing congregation. This project is, in some ways, the result, although not the culmination, of that process. I am acutely aware that the world, the congregation I serve, and my own life will not stop changing; but this project is at least one way in which I can contribute to healing some of the wounds that are so much a part of life in our congregations today and into the future.

Faith communities in the United States today are functioning in an increasingly complex and demanding context. Members of our congregations are finding it more and more difficult to cope with the changes in their lives and in their support systems, whether familial or societal. Traditionally the church has served to provide for these challenges, but it has become more and more problematical for those needs to be met effectively in growing congregations where the minister is no longer able to be in direct contact with all of the members.

Particularly when a congregation grows beyond what has been labeled “pastoral size” to “program size,”<sup>3</sup> it is not possible for the minister to provide all the necessary pastoral care and counseling to that community. Consequently, she or he must help the congregation find additional ways to provide effective

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<sup>3</sup> Mann, The In-Between Church 18

ways to share pastoral care and counseling with and for members in that context. In fact, often before, and certainly after, the church grows to a "program size," the congregation and its members can benefit greatly from a shared ministry model. Such an effort will have positive effects on the health and wellbeing of the minister and his or her family, members of a congregation, of the congregation itself, and of the larger community. In fact, the minister may well be doing an injustice to the members of a congregation of any size by not allowing them to share in the ministry to and with the congregation. If the minister is seen as providing all the pastoral care in the congregation, others with gifts in that area may not feel empowered to recognize and use them for the good of others - a loss to themselves, to the church community, and the larger world.

If the institutionalizing of effective pastoral care and counseling through shared ministry has had, and will continue to have, a positive effect on a congregation's life and the physical, mental, and spiritual health of its minister and members in a changing society, it is hoped that such an emphasis can be encouraged in many congregations. With that goal in mind, this project will substantiate the value of and create a design for the development and implementation of a shared ministry model of pastoral care and counseling in a particular program size Unitarian Universalist congregation for the nurture of members. Further, the expectation is that this program could ultimately be

applied in other congregations of the same size, as well as other sizes, in a number of faith traditions.

### Thesis

The thesis of this study is that in the context of a "program size" congregation such as the Conejo Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship and other "program size" churches, a shared ministry model comprised of Lay Ministry, Neighborhood Networks, Covenant Groups, and Pastoral Counseling can be designed and implemented to provide effectively for the pastoral care and counseling needs of the members of the congregation and that such a plan can greatly enhance other aspects of congregational life.

### Definitions of Major Terms

The following terms will be used throughout this study and need to be defined in order to insure a common understanding.

Pastoral Care in its most basic sense is any act that provides for the support and nurture of a person or group out of a sense of deep concern for their physical and spiritual wellbeing. Such care can be provided either by professional clergy or concerned laypersons to people in need. <sup>4</sup>

A practical application of pastoral care in a Unitarian Universalist setting would include a variety of services. Things such as preventive and educational programs for the increased awareness and protection of both adults and young people; encouragement for self care; home and hospital visits for the support of

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<sup>4</sup> Rodney J. Hunter, "Pastoral Care and Counseling," in Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling, ed. Rodney J. Hunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 845.

ill congregants, their families, and support networks; visits with those in situational distress of all kinds; crisis intervention when immediate response is critical; support when a call for help is received; telephone or e-mail communication of support in all types of situations; prayer, meditation, and spiritual direction for those in need; support during grief and loss of all kinds; sermons of comfort and direction during worship or memorial services, and other types of worship and ritual experiences could all be considered pastoral care.

Pastoral Counseling, on the other hand, is a much more clearly focused activity that is concentrated on a particular area of concern with a more long term goal or outcome in mind. It also involves a much more structured approach with a trained counselor and in which a schedule of regular meetings is determined.<sup>5</sup>

Pastoral counseling by ministers or trained counselors in a Unitarian Universalist context addresses a great many things. For example, it often involves, but is not limited to, such services as premarital sessions for couples, grief work with many types of loss, couples counseling when relationship issues occur, family counseling with both the entire group and/or a subset of the whole family system, evaluation and tentative diagnosis of those with potential mental illness, and referrals to health care professionals.

Pastoral Size Congregation - According to the work of Arlin Rothauge and Alice Mann, the pastoral size congregation has Sunday morning attendance

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<sup>5</sup> Hunter, 845.



of between 50 and 150, including children and youth, with a plateau zone between 50 and 70.<sup>6</sup>

Program Size Congregation – In their early work Rothauge and Mann define this category as ranging from 150 to 350 people, including children and youth, in Sunday morning attendance with a plateau zone from 150 to 200.<sup>7</sup> More recently Mann has modified the upper limit of this category to 400, based on some of her later research; but the lower limit has remained the same.<sup>8</sup>

Family and Corporate Size Congregations – A family size congregation, according to Rothauge and Mann, is a church that has less than fifty people attending on Sunday morning.<sup>9</sup> A corporate size congregation, (called “corporation size” by Rothauge<sup>10</sup>) is at the opposite extreme and is described by Mann as a church that has attendance on Sunday morning of over 400 people with a plateau zone from 400 to 500.<sup>11</sup>

#### Work Previously Done in the Field

There is a great deal of writing that has been done on the topic of church size and the effect that it has on congregational life. Primary to this topic has been the work on size theory by Arlin Rothauge and Alice Mann. First proposed in print by Rothauge in his booklet Sizing up Congregations for New Member Ministry in 1983, and later expanded in the work of Mann in her books The In-

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<sup>6</sup> Mann, In-Between Church, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Mann, In-Between Church, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Alice Mann, Raising the Roof (Herndon, Va.: Alban Institute, 2001), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Mann, In-Between Church, 17

<sup>10</sup> Arlin Rothauge, 31.

<sup>11</sup> Mann, Raising the Roof, 7 - 8

Between Church: Navigating Size Transitions in 1998 and Raising the Roof: The Pastoral to Program Transition in 2001, it is their contention that the size of a church has a definite effect on the way in which that church works. In these publications the authors designated names to different church sizes. Of greatest significance for this project, Mann wrote that what she called the “program size” church encouraged a wider participation of leaders in all areas of church life, with the minister as a leader of the team but not its only player.<sup>12</sup> This description has a great significance for this project since it is my experience that the size of a congregation has a very clear relationship to the amount of pastoral care and counseling that can be done by the minister of the congregation, something that Mann mentions only briefly in one of her books by saying that in a program size church, “pastoral care is shared by laity.”<sup>13</sup>

Literature in the pastoral care and counseling field is, of course, also very important for this project because it is related to the need for nurturing personal connections between people. Because of the nature of shared ministry, some of the major influences in this field have come from the work of Howard Clinebell in his development of Growth Therapy, Edwin Friedman in his Family Systems Theory, and John Patton as he examines the importance of pastoral care in communal and contextual terms.

About the issue of the need for nurturing relationships, Clinebell writes that a “spiritually empowered approach to the healing and helping process” is

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<sup>12</sup> Mann, Raising the Roof, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Mann, Raising the Roof, 7.

vital for the growth of anyone to his or her greatest capability.<sup>14</sup> Further, he says that he sees great power in the development of groups of laity gathering to support each other and to encourage ongoing growth,<sup>15</sup> certainly an important element of congregational life.

Edwin Friedman has also contributed to this field of understanding group dynamics through his insistence that people are not just individual entities but are part of systems of relationship in families and other associations, making it critical for us to recognize the importance these interconnections in any setting. Of these connections, he writes that our ability to understand the complex contacts within the family are critical to our ability to interact in other relationships systems as a source of power and healing.<sup>16</sup>

John Patton illuminates the important contributions of individual pastoral caregivers, supporting an underlying assumption of this project. He reminds his readers that in today's complex world, congregation members need to find support in the individual as well as the group context. One of his concerns is that individuals must feel the sense of truly being cared for and listened to, whether by a minister or a layperson.<sup>17</sup> He sees the importance of what he calls "re-membering," in its many permutations, as a vital part of individual pastoral

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<sup>14</sup> Howard Clinebell, Counseling for Spiritually Empowered Wholeness: A Hope-Centered Approach (New York: Haworth Pastoral Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>15</sup> Clinebell, Counseling for Spiritually Empowered Wholeness, 44.

<sup>16</sup> Edwin Friedman, Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), 309.

<sup>17</sup> John Patton, Pastoral Care in Context: An Introduction to Pastoral Care (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 59.

care,<sup>18</sup> something that all pastoral care providers need to understand and value. In addition, he calls attention to the importance of a feeling of community in a congregational context through what he calls “common identity” and “shared memory,”<sup>19</sup> both references to the vital aspects of communities of care, a critical part of pastoral care and counseling within a congregation.

Unitarian Universalist theological perspectives, as they are affected by congregational polity and as they influence pastoral care, are also critical, especially because each UU congregation is largely an autonomous entity. In this project, the work of the Commission on Appraisal of the Unitarian Universalist Association and the contribution of Conrad Wright are used to show the connection between pastoral care and counseling and the unique polity of Unitarian Universalism. Conrad Wright, for example, points out the reality, throughout the history of Unitarian Universalism, that individual Unitarians and Universalists and their congregations have jealously guarded their right to a non-hierarchical structure,<sup>20</sup> making the more egalitarian model of pastoral care and counseling suggested here very appropriate for UU congregations.

In a publication that brings the present-day conflict from this type of polity into view, the UUA Commission on Appraisal highlights the importance of each congregation’s responsibility toward marginalized people: the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community; people of color; children and young

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<sup>18</sup> Patton, 15.

<sup>19</sup> Patton, 20 – 21.

<sup>20</sup> Conrad Wright, Congregational Polity: A Historical Survey of Unitarian Universalist Practice (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1997), 1-2.

people; and those whose religious beliefs are not those of the majority.<sup>21</sup> The difficulty of such a strong and seemingly authoritarian position by the commission in a tradition that gives each congregation the right to declare its own perspective with relation to other congregations can be problematical. In relation to pastoral care and counseling, however, such a declaration is less contentious than it might be in other areas of congregational life because of the covenant among Unitarian Universalist congregations to honor all people, whatever their racial, ethnic, national, gender identification, sexual orientation, or theological perspective.

Although the works cited in chapter 2 of this project are not specifically about pastoral care and counseling, their Unitarian Universalist theological perspectives are directly applicable to the topic. Pastoral care and counseling is both broadened and contextualized through the pastoral theology of Unitarian theologian James Luther Adams; Henry Nelson Wieman; and the influence of the Unitarian Universalist Principles and Purposes, adopted by the UUA General Assembly in 1985 and included in chapter 2 of this document. These sources, and others, demonstrate the relationship between theology and the context of an individual congregation and the larger Unitarian Universalist denomination.

Unitarian Universalist theologian James Luther Adams writes about the freedom we humans have of joining together with one another and the importance of those connections in his book On Being Human Religiously, in

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<sup>21</sup> Unitarian Universalist Association, Interdependence: Renewing Congregational Polity (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1997), 138 – 45.

which he writes about what he calls” voluntary associations” and says that when those in these groups engage in worthwhile goals and have strong dedication to each other, they can be “the salt that has not lost its savor.”<sup>22</sup> In addition, when these associations are connected to churches that foster a firm commitment by a loving group of people, they can call members into “a community of mercy and freedom and hope,”<sup>23</sup> a worthy goal for any congregation and an important guideline for meaningful pastoral care and counseling.

The primary contribution of Henry Nelson Wieman, as it relates to this project, is to a Unitarian Universalist theology of relationship through what he calls a “creative event” in which individuals can be transformed.<sup>24</sup> The church, he believes, has the greatest opportunity to bring this transformation about because of its ability to promote “creative interchange” between and among people, stimulate creativity and responsibility for facing problems in the larger community, and inspire people to move beyond their own individual interests. At its best, he believes that the liberal church is best suited for this work and must take on that task or surrender its charge to another organization.<sup>25</sup>

Information about shared ministry is a major part of the work of Jean Trumbauer and has been given a Unitarian Universalist perspective by Barbara Child in her book Shared Ministry Handbook. Further information on shared

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<sup>22</sup> James Luther Adams, On Being Human Religiously, ed. Max Stackhouse (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 85, citing Mt. 5:13, Mk. 9:50, and Lk. 14:34.

<sup>23</sup> James Luther Adams, An Examined Faith: Social Context and Religious Commitment, ed. George K. Beach (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 365.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Nelson Wieman, The Source of Human Good (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1946), 292.

<sup>25</sup> Wieman, Source of Human Good, 292 – 93.

ministerial power is explored in the work of Roy Phillips in his book Letting Go: Transforming Congregations for Ministry.

The work of Jean Trumbauer has formed the basis for much of the exploration of shared ministry by others. Her two books, Sharing the Ministry and Created and Called provide practical guides for the implementation of a shared ministry program in the context of a church. The inspiration for her work, particularly as it relates to pastoral care and counseling, seems to be best expressed in a quotation that she includes in Created and Called from the writing of Frederick Buechner in Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC in which he writes: "Our vocation is that place where our deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."<sup>26</sup> She makes references to a paradigm shift from dependence on ministry done by professionally trained clergy with "helpers" to a model in which all of those in the church have a ministry to share.<sup>27</sup> Although she admits that this change will not be made quickly or easily in our churches, she is convinced that ministry is the way in which all people can join in the "God's ongoing creative and restoring activity in the world."<sup>28</sup>

In her book on shared ministry, Unitarian Universalist Minister Barbara Child describes this type of ministry and cites its strengths and weaknesses from both the ministerial and layperson's points of view. She then illustrates the

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<sup>26</sup> Frederick Buechner, Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 95, cited and quoted by Jean Morris Trumbauer, Created and Called: Discovering Our Gifts for Abundant Living (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1998), 173.

<sup>27</sup> Jean Morris Trumbauer, Sharing the Ministry: A Practical Guide for Transforming Volunteers into Ministers (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1995), 34.

<sup>28</sup> Trumbauer, Sharing the Ministry, 34, 47.

work of Trumbauer with concrete examples and interviews from Unitarian Universalist congregations. Child writes in the introduction to this book that the basic premise of shared ministry is the conviction that everyone in the congregation, not just minister, is called to serve others in their religious community through the sharing of their unique gifts. When that is true, she writes, the entire congregation becomes involved in nurturing the spiritual health of those people in their religious community.<sup>29</sup> Although its focus is not just on pastoral care and counseling, this book is an excellent example of the practical application of a variety of shared ministry models in diverse congregations.

The work of Unitarian Universalist minister Roy Phillips provides support for the minister in letting go of some of the control of ministry in the congregation that she or he serves. He writes: "I believe that a congregation is a gathering of people with God-implemented gifts."<sup>30</sup> He then goes on to say that it is also a place that can provide the opportunity for those people to share their gifts in a ministry that is both individual and communal.<sup>31</sup> The other benefits that Phillips sees in encouraging laypeople to participate in ministry are: their appreciation of the powerful, valuable, and exceptional gifts in themselves and others; the development of a deepened spirituality through active involvement; the opportunity for people to become effective in sharing their gifts for ministry; and

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<sup>29</sup> Barbara Child, ed., The Shared Ministry Sourcebook (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1996), 1.

<sup>30</sup> Roy D. Phillips, Letting Go: Transforming Congregations for Ministry (Herndon, Va.: Alban Institute), 2000, 53.

<sup>31</sup> Phillips, Letting Go, 53.



a heightened feeling of connection among the members of the congregation.<sup>32</sup>

All of these are certainly positive assets for the life of any religious community.

On the topic of shared ministry in pastoral care and counseling and other ministerial functions, there is also research that highlights the ethical implications that shared ministry poses for the professional clergy and the congregation that she or he serves. Some of the important ethical issues for discussion are: clericalism and the sharing of power, the appropriateness of sharing pastoral care duties between laity and clergy, the effects of gender on a shared ministry of pastoral care and counseling, the importance of providing pastoral care and counseling in a congregation to those who suffer with severe mental illness, and the continued evaluation of pastoral care and counseling programs within a congregation. Examination of some of these topics is part of the work of Kathryn Palen, Roy Phillips, and others.

Author Kathryn Palen, an American Baptist minister, points to the obstacles to shared ministry, including barriers of terminology that artificially separate clergy and laity, unclear expectations by both clergy and laypeople, and structures within the congregation that encourage what she calls a “two-tier system” and compartmentalize both groups.<sup>33</sup> In this article, she writes, “Overcoming these obstacles to ministry of all calls for a cultural shift in our congregations.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Phillips, Letting Go, 60 – 61.

<sup>33</sup> Kathryn Palen, “A Ministry of All,” Congregations: Learning, Leading, Changing 30, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 24.

<sup>34</sup> Palen, 25.

Another point of view is revealed in the writing of Roy Phillips who recognizes the culpability of some ministers in denying members of their congregations the opportunity for sharing the ministry. He reports that a senior ministerial colleague told him very strongly that only clergy were capable of providing pastoral care to those members who were hospitalized. It was only a number of years later that Phillips began to recognize the fallacy of that opinion through his own ministerial experience.<sup>35</sup> Further, Phillips writes about the importance of the ministerial use of power in a positive rather than a unilateral way because of his exposure to the ideas of Bernard Loomer, formerly his professor at the University of Chicago Divinity School. He writes that Loomer's point of view is that the use of unilateral power in the church is inconsistent with the idea of valuing all people as having inherent worth, something that diminishes that opportunity for both the individual and the congregation.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to the ethical implications of shared power, there are the further challenges found in the conflicting pressures of gender differences as well as patriarchal and feminist theologies. The research of Alan G. Johnson, Carol Gilligan, Sharon Welch, Ann Svennungsen, and others sheds light on these controversial areas of investigation. These authors explore the effects of gender on the ways in which women and men experience their lives and are provided with opportunities for growth and advancement.

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<sup>35</sup> Phillips, Letting Go, 67.

<sup>36</sup> Phillips, Letting Go, 143 - 44.

As background for this potential area of conflict between women and men, Alan Johnson points out the glass ceiling that is a reality for most women because of the patriarchal influence that still exists in this country.<sup>37</sup> Although he admits that some things have changed in our society, there continues to be a great disparity between women and men in many areas of life; and he says that our society is still organized around the principles of “hierarchy, control, and dominance.”<sup>38</sup> In addition he reports that this system is difficult to change because of its long and deeply rooted history.<sup>39</sup> The importance of Johnson's work for this project is the effect that patriarchy continues to have on the roles of women in ministry, particularly as it relates to the ethical connection with pastoral care and counseling explored in chapter 3.

A further investigation of the ethical implications of gender for power and influence is found in the work of Carol Gilligan. She writes about the difference between men and women with regard to their degree of connections to others. According to her research, Gilligan reports, women are usually more relational while men are generally more individualistic in their ways of making ethical decisions.<sup>40</sup> Gilligan also writes that women's sense of value is very much interwoven with the importance of relationship and caregiving in a way that

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<sup>37</sup> Allan G. Johnson, The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 5, 12.

<sup>38</sup> Johnson, 12 – 13.

<sup>39</sup> Johnson, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge: Boston University Press, 1982), 160.

sometimes blocks recognition of themselves as valuable human beings,<sup>41</sup> an influence that may well have ethical connotations for pastoral care and counseling as it relates to women as caregivers who do not receive the recognition that such important work merits.

An article by Ann Svennungsen, a retired Lutheran minister, serves, at least partially, to integrate the work of Johnson and Gilligan as it is applied to women in ministry. In this article she writes that the gender bias against women in ministry seems to come from the reality that women often have to earn the authority in ministry that is automatically bestowed upon men.<sup>42</sup> In this same article Svennungsen quotes feminist theologian Daphne Hampson of St. Andrews University in Scotland who says that: "The task for men . . . is to learn to find themselves *in relationship*; the task of women is to find *themselves* in relationship." <sup>43</sup>

The common thread in all of this information about women in ministry of all types is that gender definitely has an effect on both the way women ministers are perceived and the way in which they perceive themselves. The ethical implications of this connection between gender and the role of women for pastoral care and counseling are further explored in Chapter 3 of this project.

Information and practical applications of pastoral care and counseling through Covenant Groups has been extensively investigated and developed in

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<sup>41</sup> Gilligan, 126 – 27.

<sup>42</sup> Ann Svennungsen, "When Women Lead the Flock," Congregations – Learning Leading Changing 30, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 21 – 24.

<sup>43</sup> Svennungsen, 23.

the work of Robert Hill, Calvin Dame, and Thandeka. Robert Hill is the District Executive of the Southwest District of the Unitarian Universalist Association, the author of The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry, and a passionate advocate for covenant groups in UU congregations.<sup>44</sup> Calvin Dame is the minister of the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of August, Maine, and one of the early proponents of small group ministry.<sup>45</sup> Thandeka is a professor at the Meadville Lombard Theological School, a Unitarian Universalist seminary in Chicago, who has focused her attention on the spiritual aspects of covenant group ministry.<sup>46</sup> The information from these sources and others provides both theoretical and practical tools that can be used by congregations to implement an effective program of pastoral care and counseling in the local congregation through the development of Covenant Groups, as described in Chapter 5 of this project.

Practical applications of pastoral care and counseling in the Unitarian Universalist context are explored in the work of Anthony Stringer, Lisa Capehart Hulse, and K.C. Burgess-Yakemovic from the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta, Georgia, in their Lay Ministry Training Curriculum. Although the total lay ministry program in this curriculum is not devoted to pastoral care and counseling, it is a vital part of the curriculum as it has been developed by the lay ministry coordinators and the trained lay ministers. The

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<sup>44</sup> Robert L. Hill, The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry: Saving the World Ten at a Time (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2003), x.

<sup>45</sup> Hill, 60.

<sup>46</sup> Thandeka, "Healing Community," UU World, Jan. – Feb. 2005. 7, 30.

important elements in this program are summarized as the value of compassionate listening, awareness of the needs of others, true empathy for others, trustworthiness, and inspiration for spiritual growth and healing in others.<sup>47</sup> A detailed program of pastoral care and counseling through Lay Ministry forms the basis for Chapter 6 in this project.

### Procedures for Integration

The primary methodology for this project has been the use of interviews with members and friends of the congregation that I am serving and interviews with Unitarian Universalist ministers in other “program size” congregations in Southern California, exploring experiences of both laypeople and ministers to illustrate the practical application of the theories presented in the research described above. The congregants from the Conejo Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship were interviewed to gain an understanding of their perceptions about the availability and effectiveness of the current and proposed methods for providing pastoral care and counseling in their congregation and to afford a degree of objectivity about the pastoral care and counseling being provided in that congregation. The information from these interviews comprises a case study of this congregation.

In addition, I conducted interviews with ministers from all eleven of the “program size” congregations in the Pacific South West Unitarian Universalist District - not including the Conejo Valley congregation, the church that I am

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<sup>47</sup> Anthony Stringer, Lisa Capehart Hulse, and K.C. Burgess-Yakemovic, Lay Ministry Training Curriculum (Atlanta: Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta, 2001), 141.

currently serving. The purpose of these interviews has been to ascertain insights from these ministers about the challenges and successes of providing pastoral care in their own congregational and geographical settings.

Questionnaires were provided prior to the interviews with both of these groups to allow those being interviewed to consider their responses and to focus the information to be gathered. These questionnaires are included in appendices A and D, and the data is shared and analyzed in Chapter 4.

In addition to the interview data, this project has used Unitarian Universalist theological reflection, background, and polity, along with intellectual exploration and personal experience, to support the thesis and then to develop a plan for the implementation of an organized structure of pastoral care and counseling for a “program size” congregation. It is hoped that such an emphasis will be useful for those in Unitarian Universalist congregations and the larger community of congregations from other faith traditions.

#### Scope and Limitations

The major context of this project is the Pacific Southwest District of the Unitarian Universalist Association, and particularly the Conejo Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship as a part of that district. That district includes Southern California, Arizona, and Southern Nevada. The primary focus in that context is on “program size” Unitarian Universalist congregations. Although congregations of other sizes could also benefit from these programs, the intent of this project is specifically to provide a solution for the expanded pastoral care and counseling

needs of the program size congregation. The reason for limiting this project to this selected geographical area is my awareness of and connections to the congregations in this area and to the opportunity to explore the issue in greater depth at a closer range.

One reason for limiting the scope of this project to "program size" congregations is both personal and more broadly based. From my experience and that of those interviewed for this project, I believe that the size transition from "pastoral size" to "program size" puts a serious strain on the abilities of a minister to provide effective pastoral care without severe physical, psychological and spiritual stress, unless she or he finds support in other ways. While I am aware that other factors may certainly play a role in such pressure, I am convinced that this particular size transition in a minister's church is one of the major factors in straining his or her ability to cope with the increasing number of roles that she or he is expected to play – a factor that makes providing effective pastoral care very difficult.

As the minister of a congregation that is now within the size range of this study, I have found the information that has been revealed in the research and analysis for this project to be of great importance to me. Hopefully, it will also be useful to other ministers of "program size" churches in our district and beyond. Through the willingness of many congregants of the Conejo Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship and a number of the ministers in the Pacific South West District of the Unitarian Universalist Association to share their insights, this



research has also provided a unique opportunity for me to gain an in-depth picture of the pastoral care and counseling being offered in all the churches that were a part of this study.

The intended audience of this project is ministers and lay leaders in Unitarian Universalist and other congregations of "program size." It is possible that this information can also be applied to congregations of larger sizes and smaller sizes, but those groups will not be the primary audience for this project. With the information provided by this project, ministers and lay leaders should be able to expand the range and effectiveness of pastoral care programs in their own congregations and to evaluate the successes of their programs.

While the time-frame of this research cannot produce analysis of these congregations over an extended period, it draws on the expertise and experience of both parishioners and ministers over their history in Unitarian Universalist congregations. Consequently, the time covered has been much longer than the period during which the information has been gathered for this project. Certainly, this study has not been exhaustive; and many issues have been raised for further research. However, my hope and belief is that this project can serve as an inspiration for ministers and laypeople in developing programs that will serve the pastoral care and counseling needs of their congregations in increasingly vital ways.

### Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1 is an introduction of the project and its methodology, providing an overview of the problem to be investigated and its importance, the thesis statement, definitions of major terms, work previously done in the field, the procedure for integration, the scope and limitations of the project, and this chapter outline.

Chapter 2 presents a Unitarian Universalist theology of pastoral care and counseling as it is affected by individual congregational polity and denominational principles and as it forms a basis for pastoral care and counseling within a Unitarian Universalist congregation.

Chapter 3 describes and investigates ethical challenges to the implementation of a shared ministry model of pastoral care and counseling from the perspectives of shared power, the legitimacy of lay ministry, and the concomitant effects of both patriarchy and feminism.

Chapter 4 discusses data collected from a questionnaire that was administered by lay ministers in the Conejo Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in relation to pastoral care and counseling effectiveness in that congregation and from interviews with ministers from program size churches in the Pacific South West District of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

Chapters 5 and 6 describe in detail three models of shared ministry for the implementation of a pastoral care program. Chapter 5 presents a shared ministry model for effective pastoral care through the development of a

Covenant Group program, central to a shared ministry plan. Chapter 6 presents shared ministry models for effective pastoral care through the development of a Lay Ministry program and the creation of Neighborhood Networks.

Chapter 7 draws the project to a close, defines possible criteria for evaluating the success of a shared ministry program of pastoral care, and suggests future possibilities for shared ministry as a means of providing pastoral care.

The Appendices include examples of tools used and additional information gathered in this research with laypeople and ministers.

Appendix A includes congregational research tools and information.

Appendix B shows results from the congregational questionnaire.

Appendix C contains a survey for Neighborhood Network chairs.

Appendix D includes ministerial research tools and information.

Appendix E compares congregational attendance and membership.

## **Chapter 2**

### **A Unitarian Universalist Theology of Pastoral Care and Counseling**

Pastoral care and counseling in a congregation does not arise full-blown without some basis in a larger perspective. It must come from a sense of meaning and purpose that is grounded in a particular context. In this case, because the writer of this document is a Unitarian Universalist minister, that context is a personal theology of compassion and the belief that because each person has value and worth, he or she deserves to be treated with dignity and caring concern.

#### Effects of Congregational Polity

The theology presented in this paper is, at least partially, unique to me and not the unanimously accepted theology of all Unitarian Universalists. Unitarian Universalism is a distinctive religious tradition that is covenantal rather than creedal. That is to say that each individual Unitarian Universalist is responsible for discovering her or his own spiritual path in a covenantal relationship with those in a congregation and for honoring the beliefs of others even when they are very different from one's own. Consequently, the development of a theology of pastoral care and counseling, even within a congregational setting, is virtually always an individual project although it is almost certainly inspired by the basic principles of Unitarian Universalism and the influences of a particular community. But since there is no single dogma that is accepted by even the majority of Unitarian Universalists and the

denominational headquarters in Boston has no absolute power over the congregations or their members, each person is free within the context of that ethos to develop her or his own perspective.

### Effects of Denominational Principles

With that caveat in mind, there is a set of seven Principles and Purposes that has been accepted by the congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association to form a support structure for the beliefs of individual Unitarian Universalist congregations and the members in those congregations. Although these Principles and Purposes are interpreted by individuals in order to resonate with their own beliefs, these commonly accepted tenets may be said to be the foundation for the beliefs and actions of most Unitarian Universalists. Accepted by the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly in 1984 and 1985 through an overwhelmingly positive vote by delegates from congregations throughout the United States and Canada, the values represented by these principles inspire the theology of pastoral care and counseling that are the basis of this project. These Principles and Purposes appear below.

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: The inherent worth and dignity of every person; Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations; Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations; A free and responsible search for truth and meaning; The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large; The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all; Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Unitarian Universalist Association, Hymnbook Resources Commission, Singing the Living Tradition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), ix.

From my point of view, the theology that best interprets these Unitarian Universalist Principles and Purposes for pastoral care and counseling is panentheism, a belief system that sees the divine as both imminent and transcendent – within each being and connecting all creatures to something greater than themselves. This theology is consistent with the holistic view expressed in the first and the last of the seven Unitarian Universalist principles. The first principle recognizes the divine spark in each person by saying that we agree to “affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person.” And the seventh principle shows our connection to a power beyond ourselves when it says that we agree to “affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.”

The divine spirit, which I call God, is found within that interdependent web which connects and is in all the parts of the universe that exist. Not some anthropomorphic being beyond the world, the God of panentheism is in the people, the trees, the animals, the plants, the atmosphere, the sun, the rivers, the earth - everything that is. In addition, everything that exists is also within God. Holding this view of God, a panentheist believes that each part of the universe is precious; and humans, because of their abilities as sentient and reasoning beings with free will to choose the right path, are accountable today as the caretakers of the universe with responsibility for what happens to all living beings. If that is true, then it is the responsibility and privilege of a panentheist to

be a caregiver to others as a provider of pastoral care and counseling and to be one who is the guardian of his or her own self care.

This theology is also clearly supported by the words of Unitarian Universalist minister Forrest Church when he says that "The Liberal God suffers with us when we suffer, fails when we fail, even as the life force or creative spirit works within us and others to make us better people and the world a better place."<sup>2</sup> Further, he says: "God is not God's name, but when we respond to the best that is in us, . . . God's image is present."<sup>3</sup> Certainly no one can prove that God calls us to walk and suffer with others, but that theology can inspire a commitment to pastoral care and counseling as a way to make the world a better place and to help alleviate the pain and suffering of others wherever and whenever that can be done so that God's presence can be realized in the world.

The importance of the panentheistic theology for a pastoral care and counseling provider is that it provides a basis for uniting religious beliefs with life. Perhaps that is what Unitarian Universalist theologian James Luther Adams meant when he said that social responsibility is "a response to that divine, self-giving love that creates and continually transforms a community of persons." In fact, he challenges us through what he calls the "prophethood of all believers" to make our lives a testimony to our theology.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Forrest Church, God and Other Famous Liberals (New York: Walker and Company, 1996), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Church, God and Other Famous Liberals, 12.

<sup>4</sup> James Luther Adams, The Prophethood of All Believers, ed. George K. Beach (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 152, 157.

Whether Adams would agree or not, the first six Unitarian Universalist Principles and Purposes seem to be illustrations of the ways in which people are called to speak and act as prophets for good in the world so that the “interdependent web of all existence” may be transformed. Pastoral caregivers, at their best, are certainly acting to integrate their lives with their beliefs when they are serving others with caring concern.

For example, affirming “the inherent worth and dignity of every person” can mean that because each person has value as a part of the divine, whatever his or her race, intellectual ability, sexual orientation, gender identification, degree of mental or physical health, or disability, committed panentheists must do everything they can to acknowledge a connection to others. As a Unitarian Universalist pastoral caregiver, that belief means that individuals must also continue to be willing to expand their horizons in ways that help them to empathize with the suffering of others in order to walk with those people in both joy and sadness. If a Unitarian Universalist caregiver does not genuinely believe and behave as if each person has “inherent worth and dignity,” his or her ability to share in ministry with others is also diminished.

“Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations” means to UU caregivers that in addition to simply believing that each person has divine worth and dignity, they will do whatever they are able to give all people the rights to physical and mental health that they deserve. In fact, that conviction led James Luther Adams to become actively involved in social action in the underground



resistance movement in Hitler's Germany and to say that he saw responsible social action as a response that brings to life the divine power of love.<sup>5</sup> It is that belief that led me into ministry and the pursuit of a Doctor of Ministry degree in pastoral care and counseling in order to be more effective in my own vocation and in the guidance of others in caring ministry.

For a person to pledge "to affirm and promote the acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations" and "a free and responsible search for truth and meaning" can also be a basis for shared ministry. It is not enough for one person to provide pastoral care and counseling. A Unitarian Universalist panentheist is called to share that gift with others and foster an environment in a congregation where all can join in a mutual endeavor of caring concern. The divine spirit may speak in many different voices, but a congregation that believes in accepting and encouraging others should be what feminist theologian Sharon Welch calls a "divine community,"<sup>6</sup> a place here and now where people support each other in their joys and sorrows in a way that honors the divine credo espoused by Jesus in Matthew 7:12 – to "do to others as you would have them do to you."

Supporting "the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process" requires a slight stretch in its application to a theology of pastoral care and counseling. But this statement does speak to the responsibility that a caregiver has to honor the rights and wishes of those she or he is serving, not

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<sup>5</sup> Adams, *On Being Human Religiously*, 110 – 11.

<sup>6</sup> Sharon D. Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 150.

his or her own. The caregiver is bound to help the person being served to reach his or her goals. This principle also expects that the caregiver will provide care to those who ask, not just to the people she or he may wish to serve. In addition it speaks to the need for those in a Unitarian Universalist congregation to be prophetic voices in the defense of those who need the support of pastoral care and counseling to deal with the challenges of their daily lives. That understanding does not mean that all people will agree with an individual's theology but that he or she must continue to speak out for the disenfranchised and help all people to receive the care that they need and deserve.

"The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all" demands that Unitarian Universalist panentheists who want to provide care for others must take their theology beyond the boundaries of a single community, or even a country, and see the needs of the world as their community, continuing to do what they can to support oppressed people everywhere. For James Luther Adams, social action was seen as a precursor of the power of God on Earth.<sup>7</sup> In addition, people in today's world are connected to others all over the globe; and we must be aware of the effect that actions of those beyond our borders may have on the lives of those in our own congregations and communities. Through encouraging care and empathy for others, wherever they may be, qualities that must be a part of any compassionate theology, we can, in fact, have a positive impact on others and ourselves.

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<sup>7</sup> Adams, On Being Human Religiously, 117.

In conclusion, because of their belief that God is intimately interconnected within every particle of the universe, Unitarian Universalist panentheists must embody the best of that divine quality in their theology of pastoral care and counseling. While some may wish to disregard the pain and suffering of others, the fact that all people are part of and include the divine makes it impossible for those who profess to believe in such an ultimate reality to simply shrug their collective shoulders and walk away. The spark of God that is in each of us must rebel at such a thought, and there is no more important response to the divine connection than to be dedicated to the pastoral vocation of care.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Ethical Challenges**

#### **To the Implementation of Shared Ministry**

One of the primary issues for pastoral care and counseling in any faith tradition is its relationship to a sense of ethics and integrity. In a congregational setting, therefore, it is the undeniable obligation of that religious group to provide for both the spiritual and physical nurture of those who are a part of the community. It is to that issue that Jean Trumbauer speaks when she says, "We are all called to use our gifts to share in God's ongoing creative and redemptive activity on earth" and "the mission of the church is to facilitate that process."<sup>1</sup> Not to do that in the area of pastoral care and counseling is to forsake the responsibility that has been a major component of the mission of the church throughout history. In fact, many people become part of a religious community, at least partially, in order to find a connection with other people with whom they can share both their joys and their sorrows. With that mission clearly in view, it will be the function of this chapter to investigate the ethical challenges that may be obstacles to the implementation of a shared ministry of pastoral care and counseling.

Although not all encompassing, the major ethical issues to be explored in this chapter are: clericalism and the minister's willingness to give up control of some aspects of his or her pastoral care role in a responsible way, concerns about the ethical foundation for having laity take on some of the duties of a professionally trained minister, the gender components of shared ministry and

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Trumbauer, Sharing the Ministry, 26.

power, the difficulty of providing pastoral care for those with severe mental illness, and the continued evaluation of the effectiveness of a shared ministry program of pastoral care and counseling.

For most of the twentieth century, virtually all areas of ministry have been considered to be the exclusive responsibility of the professional clergy.<sup>2</sup> However, the obstacle that is being explored at length in this project is the ability of a minister to fulfill all the pastoral care and counseling needs of those people when the congregation that she or he serves reaches “program size.” It is that issue that a shared ministry of pastoral care and counseling has been called upon to address. However, such a solution is not without its ethical problems for both laity and clergy.

### Shared Power

Barbara Child admits that there can be ethical drawbacks to shared ministry as a result of the blurred lines of authority between professional clergy and lay ministers.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, she writes that when the status of a layperson is elevated to that of a lay minister, it may be challenging for the professional minister and difficult for the congregation.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, according to Karthryn Palen, many in the clergy seem to have the expectation that they will be at the center of the congregation that

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<sup>2</sup> Elaine Graham, “Practical Theology as Transforming Practice,” in The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology, ed. James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 108.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Child, “The Character of a Shared Ministry,” in The Shared Ministry Sourcebook, ed. Barbara Child, (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1996), 12.

<sup>4</sup> Child, 13 – 14.

they serve, not in a shared role.<sup>5</sup> As a consequence, sharing the mantle of authority with laypeople, even lay ministers, may be an ethical challenge for some of these ministers who believe that they have an accountability to fulfill all the responsibilities of their office. After all, they are the ones who have been trained as professional clergy - aren't they? In this context then, ministers may see sharing the ministry as a blurring of the lines of their clerical authority. But it may actually be a form of clericalism in which the minister holds on to power and refuses to share it with others. In fact, in a recent encounter that I had with a clergy colleague, I was told that this minister was unwilling to allow members of the congregation he serves to attend an event since he could not go – perhaps because of his unwillingness to share his ministerial control with laity.

From a very practical point of view, however, some ministers may feel that it is dangerous to allow people who are insufficiently trained to engage in pastoral care and counseling. There are certainly liability, confidentiality, and professional ethics issues to be considered. These ministers may legitimately feel that it is not ethical to have laypeople performing duties for which they have not been extensively prepared, an issue that must certainly be addressed by any shared pastoral care and counseling program. In addition, they may rightly believe that there must be continued supervision and evaluation of any form of pastoral care and counseling. These concerns are certainly valid and are addressed extensively in chapters 5 and 6 of this document, to allay the fears of those ministers and others who have such concerns.

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<sup>5</sup> Palen, 24 – 25.

The acknowledgment by Child is that laity also experience difficulty with the idea of shared power and responsibility, one of the ethical issues for a shared ministry program, arising from the fact that members of the congregation may not understand or appreciate the distinctive roles, patterns of authority, or leadership expectations when the functions of ministry are shared.<sup>6</sup> As explored by American Baptist minister Kathryn Palen, the issue of a shared responsibility between professional and lay ministry may be challenging to those who believe that ministry is a professional vocation that is based on specialized training, knowledge, and skills - not an avocation of congregational members.<sup>7</sup> These parishioners may question whether it is ethical for the minister to “abandon” that portion of his or her role to a layperson, believing that this minister is not performing his or her expected clerical duty. Some may well believe that shared ministry is not a legitimate way for pastoral care to be provided. As a result, they may not be willing to accept pastoral care from a layperson, believing that to be a function of the minister alone.

### Patriarchy and Gender

Connected to the ethical issues for ministers around clerical control and authority and laity around blurred professional responsibilities is another factor that can potentially be exacerbated by a shared ministry of pastoral care and counseling. It is the ethical issues surrounding gender. In fact, the gender of both the minister and other caregivers enters the picture even in the Unitarian

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<sup>6</sup> Child, 12 – 13.

<sup>7</sup> Palen, 24.

Universalist ministry where over fifty percent of the ordained clergy are women;<sup>8</sup> and shared ministry among professional clergy of different genders, even in Unitarian Universalism, is not always uncomplicated.

In other religious traditions the disparity is even greater. There are many in this country who still do not see the possibility of having women in professional ministry. In fact, some traditions such as Roman Catholic staunchly refuse to ordain women; and I have, on more than one occasion, been asked where the “minister” was when I appeared to do a wedding or a memorial service for a non-Unitarian Universalist family. With that kind of differential between women and men in ordained clergy, one should expect some serious opposition to women taking on traditional ministerial roles as pastoral caregivers as well as preachers and celebrants of sacred rituals.

In his book Gender Knot, Allan Johnson reminds us that patriarchy is still very much alive and well in this country; and he urges us to realize there is something we can do about it.<sup>9</sup> He suggests that we must become aware of what he calls the “gender knot” of patriarchy, which keeps women bound by a male-dominated power structure, in order to “unravel” it and that we can work to create a less male-dominated world for ourselves, others, and future generations.<sup>10</sup> Certainly that is one focus of a shared ministry of pastoral care

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<sup>8</sup> Elinor Artman, “Leaping from Their Spheres,” Leaping from Our Spheres, ed. Gretchen Woods (Boston: UUMA Center Committee, 1999), 83.

<sup>9</sup> Johnson, 233 – 35.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, 253.



and counseling that attempts to break down barriers between people, whatever their gender.

It seems that even in Unitarian Universalism, a denomination where equality is encouraged in ministry, women are still being judged by male expectations and are sometimes expected to take up the more “feminine” aspects of ministry. An example of this “gender knot” in Unitarian Universalism is that even with such a large percentage of women as a part of the UU ministry, there has never been a woman president of the Unitarian Universalist Association; and most of the ministers of our largest churches are still men.

Paradoxically, when the idea of sharing pastoral care and counseling ministry is broached, there may also be a kind of boomerang effect in which women both expect and are expected to be the pastoral caregivers, whether they are from the laity or the clergy. As feminist scholar Carol Gilligan writes, women see themselves in the milieu of relationship and interdependence while men identify themselves as more individualistic.<sup>11</sup> The result may be that women in ministry and lay ministry are relegated to serving roles while male ministers are seen as leaders, an issue that must be addressed by both education and experience.

Because the caring professions have traditionally been associated with women, it often seems to be the case that women ministers are expected to take on the role of pastoral care and counseling more than male clergy. The problem with this expectation is the ethical issue of having women, once again,

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<sup>11</sup> Gilligan, 160.

take on the roles of support for a predominately male dominated clergy.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, a Catholic feminist scholar, reminds us that women who join the ranks of ministers are often expected to accept the “feminine” role of assistant minister with responsibility for the care of children, young people, or the old rather than the more elevated position of a senior minister.<sup>12</sup> We need to remember that, although women have traditionally taken on these responsibilities, that understanding does not mean that they should be limited to that area of ministry. It is ethically untenable to have them do so to the exclusion of their other talents.

As Unitarian Universalist minister Gretchen Woods writes, some women may be more nurturing than men, but that is not always the case.<sup>13</sup> To simply assume that a person is more caring and concerned for others simply because she is female, is to miss the range of gifts that women can bring to ministry. Gilligan expands this idea by writing that individuals speak in a “different voice” that may connote another “theme” but not a different gender.<sup>14</sup> That is to say that both women and men are more than their genders. They are whole persons with a variety of talents and abilities that can be nurtured and enhanced by training and the opportunity to explore them.

That is not to say that women should not be a part of a shared pastoral care ministry but that it is important that shared ministry be broadened to include

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<sup>12</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 200 – 01.

<sup>13</sup> Gretchen Woods, “Mentoring Ministry,” Leaping From Our Spheres, ed. Gretchen Woods (Boston: UUMA CENTER Committee, 1999), 168.

<sup>14</sup> Gilligan, 2.

both genders, recognizing that a sensitive and empathetic nature is not just characteristic of women. In fact, if pastoral care is to be offered to both men and women in a congregation, it is important that both genders be a part of any shared ministry of pastoral care and counseling. And what better way is there to challenge the power of the status quo than through the establishment of a shared ministry of pastoral care and counseling? Such a program can overturn the ideas that pastoral care and counseling is “women’s work” and the belief that only ministers, whether female or male, are qualified to provide pastoral care and counseling.

The difficulty for this idealistic view is expressed in the writing of Lutheran minister Ann Svennungsen, who reminds us, “If you are a woman working in a patriarchal culture, gender is always an issue,” particularly as it relates to ministry.<sup>15</sup> However, she believes that this problem can be overcome by getting communal buy-in in a congregation for the idea of shared leadership in ministry through education and experience, something that she is convinced most women have been socialized to do from an early age - that is, to be aware of people’s emotions and connections to each other.<sup>16</sup> Certainly a shared ministry of pastoral care and counseling cannot wipe out the gender bias that has been built up over the centuries, but it can call into question the idea of male dominance in ministry and broaden the opportunity for many people to

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<sup>15</sup> Svennungsen, 24.

<sup>16</sup> Svennungsen, 21 – 22.

experience that chance to walk with others in their times of need, a powerful experience for any person, regardless of gender.

The challenge for the ethics of gender equality in a shared ministry of pastoral care and counseling is that this type of caregiving does not become only the prerogative of women. It is easy to see how a minister might find the sharing of a pastoral care ministry with women a comfortable thing to do if she or he is uncomfortable in that role. However, Gilligan reminds us the ethical behavior demands both equality and respect,<sup>17</sup> something that can bring a transformation for both genders in ministry and in life. It is a gift to be shared.

#### Severe Cases of Mental Illness and Shared Ministry

Yet another ethical issue in pastoral care and counseling that periodically confronts congregations of any size is that of dealing with people who exhibit behaviors of severe mental illness that can be disruptive and even dangerous. I am concerned, however, that only two of the congregations in the sample that I interviewed have any sort of policy to deal with such issues. With no official policy, most of these congregations simply seem to expect to deal with such situations as they occur rather than providing appropriate pastoral care in advance - potentially leading to a serious situation.

Because of the unique character of the "program size" church, this issue may be expected to be exacerbated by the fact that the congregation is often in transition from a paradigm in which the minister previously had all the responsibility for interacting with people who appear psychiatrically ill to one in

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<sup>17</sup> Gilligan, 164.

which lay leadership may get involved in dealing with such issues. Not unexpectedly, the “program size” churches described in Chapter 4 of this project exhibit various ways of dealing with this challenge that are related to the size designations of Rothauge and Mann.

One of these ministers in this sample reported that the usual way of dealing with such a situation was by referring the person to an outside source. In most of the congregations there was the expectation that the minister would “take care” of the situation with the possible help of professionals in the congregation and with referrals to therapists or other health care providers or groups in the larger community. Several of the congregations mentioned other groups such as the Committee on Ministry, the Board, or what they called the Amicus Committee whose responsibility, along with the minister’s intervention, would be to resolve such issues. But the focus was still very much on resolution of each situation rather than an ongoing program within the congregation for providing support for such a person to get proper professional help.

#### Possible Solutions to These Ethical Issues

When a shared ministry program of pastoral care and counseling is being established in a “program size” church, the practical implications of the previously mentioned ethical issues emerge. The laity and the minister must embrace this shared ministry for it to succeed, and the issue of gender must be addressed if a shared ministry program of pastoral care and counseling is not to become the domain only of women.

Unitarian Universalist minister and author Roy Phillips writes that as “spiritual care providers,” we are faced with three major challenges. First, as a congregation gets larger, the “caseload” increases to an unmanageable level. Second, if the minister is seen as the primary caregiver, members of the laity are not encouraged to develop their gifts for caregiving. And third, an aura of professionalism by the minister, something that she or he may actively promote, encourages others to believe that the clergy are the only ones who can provide the needed care.<sup>18</sup>

The solution to this dilemma, Phillips says, is to find ways to share the ministry with the laity. But he is aware that such a stance is counterintuitive and seemingly in opposition to the training of many seminaries, both historically and today. He writes that, from his own experience, seminaries need to encourage their students to give up the idea of unilateral power and to move into a feeling of mutuality, encouraging these future ministers to have enough self-confidence to encourage others to find and use their own gifts.<sup>19</sup> In fact, he quotes Jean Trumbauer in support of shared ministry when she says, “Sharing the ministry is what it means to be ‘church.’”<sup>20</sup>

At an organizational level, in order to establish a shared ministry of pastoral care and counseling, congregations need to provide their caregivers with extensive training, continued evaluation, and ongoing supervision to dispel the concerns of both the minister and the laypeople. Certainly, there is the need

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<sup>18</sup> Phillips, Letting Go, 13 – 14

<sup>19</sup> Phillips, Letting Go, 144.

<sup>20</sup> Phillips, Letting Go, 56.

for ongoing evaluation of any shared pastoral care ministry. Although such a program can be developed to serve the pastoral care needs of those in the congregation, this same program could become ineffective over time if its success is not monitored and evaluated on a regular basis. A poorly managed program could be more dangerous to congregants than one that does not exist.

The materials in Chapter 5 about Covenant Groups, as well as the lay ministry curriculum from the Unitarian Universalist church in Atlanta and the information about Neighborhood Networks described in Chapter 6 of this project, provide sources for find material on the topics of training, evaluation, and supervision. The importance of professional ethics, confidentiality, listening skills, and many other important topics is extensively covered in the Lay Ministry curriculum. Both ministers and congregations of “program size” churches could also examine all the information included in this project and in the materials referenced in the bibliography. In addition they might also attend workshops on the topic presented at local, regional, or national. They might then want to experience the benefits of shared ministry for themselves, an exciting adventure.

In terms of gender issues, churches have to realize that it is unethical to keep the women of their congregations primarily in support roles, essentially robbing them and their religious communities of opportunities for experiencing the full range of their power. From this perspective, an outlook from the feminist ethics of Sharon Welch can be applied to the context of a shared ministry of

pastoral care and counseling in ways that honor the contribution of women as well as men. One of her primary ethical positions is one that she calls the feminist “ethic of risk,” in which women are encouraged to challenge those who are in control to bring about a better world for all.<sup>21</sup> She recognizes the danger for women who risk challenging the status quo is that they will be assaulted and discouraged by the patriarchy of our culture, causing them to give up the struggle. However, she asserts that these obstacles should be overcome and that love rather than power can become the means to form what Martin Luther King, Jr. described in many of his speeches as “the beloved community.”<sup>22</sup> And the ultimate goal of this ethical stance, according to Welch, is the liberation of everyone who is oppressed so that all people can be empowered and transformed through their courage and love,<sup>23</sup> certainly resonant with the idea of a shared ministry of pastoral care.

As the female minister of the Conejo Valley UU Fellowship, I understand the importance of Welch’s words. My experience has been that most of the pastoral care and counseling is both given and received by women in our congregation. In fact, the Covenant Group facilitators are largely women; the Lay Ministers are predominately women; and the Neighborhood Network Chairs are mostly women. While I do not know that men consider these programs “women’s work” or have not become a part of them because of their gender or mine, the evidence, at least in this congregation, suggests that conclusion. With

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<sup>21</sup> Welch, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Welch, 81.

<sup>23</sup> Welch, 180.



that recognition, I see the critical importance of increasing the numbers of men in all of these programs through the education of a congregation about pastoral care and counseling and the active recruitment of men for the shared ministry of pastoral care in our congregation.

Solutions for the issue of severe mental illness in a congregation are more problematical than many others. Two of the congregations described in Chapter 4 reported having policies to deal with disruptive behavior or covenants of "right relations"; but neither of the documents that I have seen refers specifically to a shared pastoral care ministry within the congregation to help with such issues. Most of the information in these policies seems to deal with behavior by those who are mentally ill or disruptive as an issue for resolution or an exhortation to deal respectfully with each other rather than a provision for compassionate care. In fact, one of the ministers in this sample even mentioned that law enforcement could be called, if necessary, although that would certainly not be that minister's recommended choice. The result of this study leads to a clear understanding that providing pastoral care for those who suffer severe mental illness is an ethical issue that needs further investigation so that it can be effectively dealt with in "program size" congregations.

In conclusion, there is a seemingly unavoidable ethical difficulty that arises when a minister of either gender realizes that the congregation has gotten to a size where she or he is no longer able to provide for all the pastoral care and counseling needs, including the issues around providing for those with

severe mental illness. Certainly the challenges of a shared ministry of pastoral care and counseling for clergy and laity, both male and female, are great. But the importance of providing effective pastoral care and counseling in a growing congregation is an ethical imperative that must override these considerations if ministry is going to be made accessible to all those who need to experience its healing power. Hopefully some of the ideas and programs offered in this project will encourage ministers and laity alike to embrace the possibilities that such an expansion of our horizon can provide.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Data Collected Through Interviews**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide specific details to illustrate the ideas about a shared ministry of pastoral care and counseling presented in other parts of this document. The information included in this chapter is a compilation and analysis of the data that I have gathered from interviews with both laypeople and ministers. The interviews of laypeople are from the Conejo Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, the congregation that I serve, in order to provide both quantitative and qualitative data and analysis about an existing pastoral care and counseling structure in a “program size” congregation. That information comprises the first section of the chapter. The ministerial interviews are with the eleven ministers, other than myself, who are serving “program size” congregations in the Pacific South West District. Through the compilation and analysis of this information, a picture of pastoral care in “program size” churches emerges, and some thoughts for future development of a shared ministry of pastoral care and counseling are proposed.

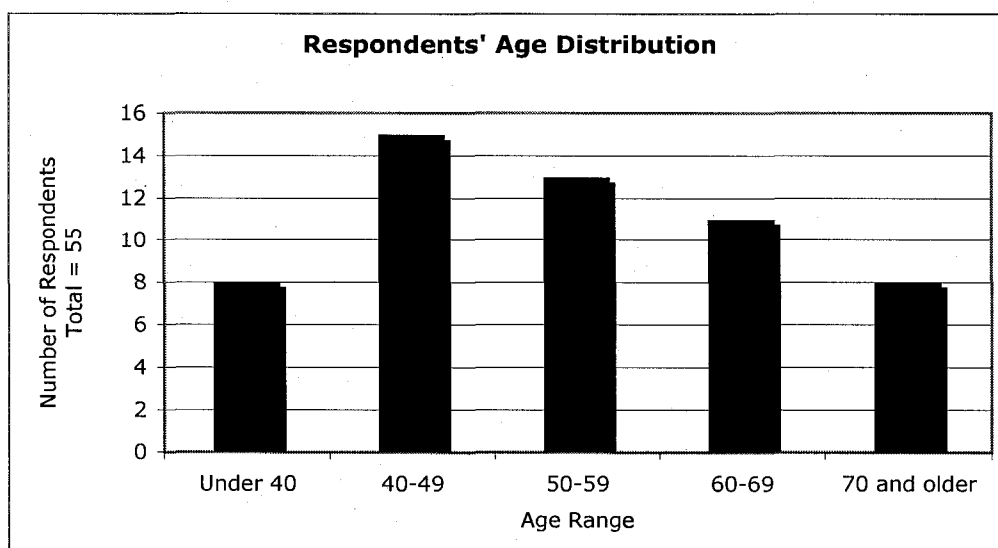
#### Laity Interview Data and Analysis

The following is information gathered from a randomly chosen group of members of the Conejo Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship community by Lay Ministers from that congregation in order to provide a more in-depth look at the pastoral care and counseling structure in a “program size” congregation and the reactions of those in that community to the pastoral care that it offers. With that purpose in mind, the introductory information in this section establishes the

demographics of this congregational setting so that the data included will be more clearly contextualized.

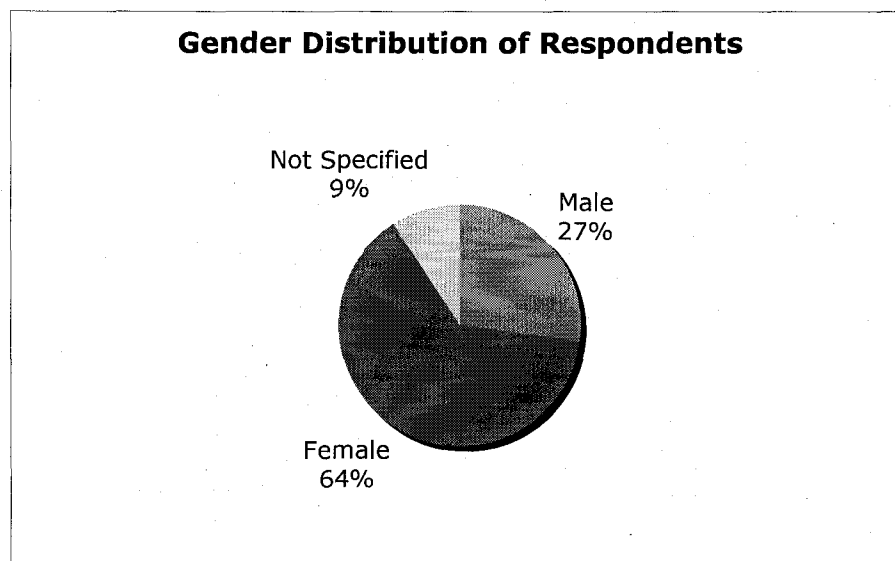
To begin, the Conejo Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship is a 192 member congregation in Thousand Oaks, California, served by a minister with over six years of professional ministry experience and twenty-eight years of high school teaching experience and reports a typical Sunday morning attendance, including children and youth, of a little over 150 people. The minister spends about 15% of her ministerial hours in active pastoral care and counseling around a number of issues, predominately having to do with relationships between and among people and grief of various types. Although she finds pastoral care and counseling in this setting very satisfying, she is also frustrated by the lack of time available to spend on this part of her ministry.

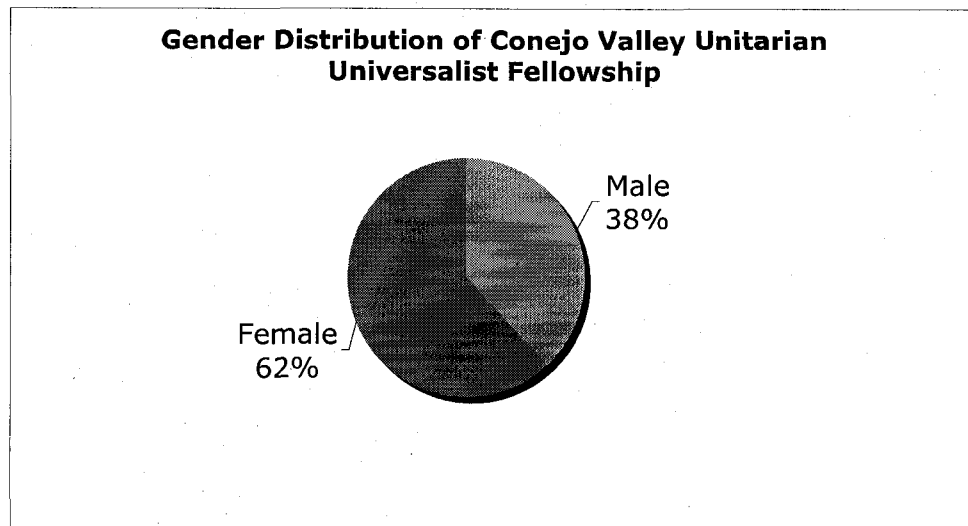
The total number of responses in this congregational sample is fifty-five people ranging in age from twelve to eighty years old with an average age of fifty-one. Below is a graph showing the distribution of ages in the sample.



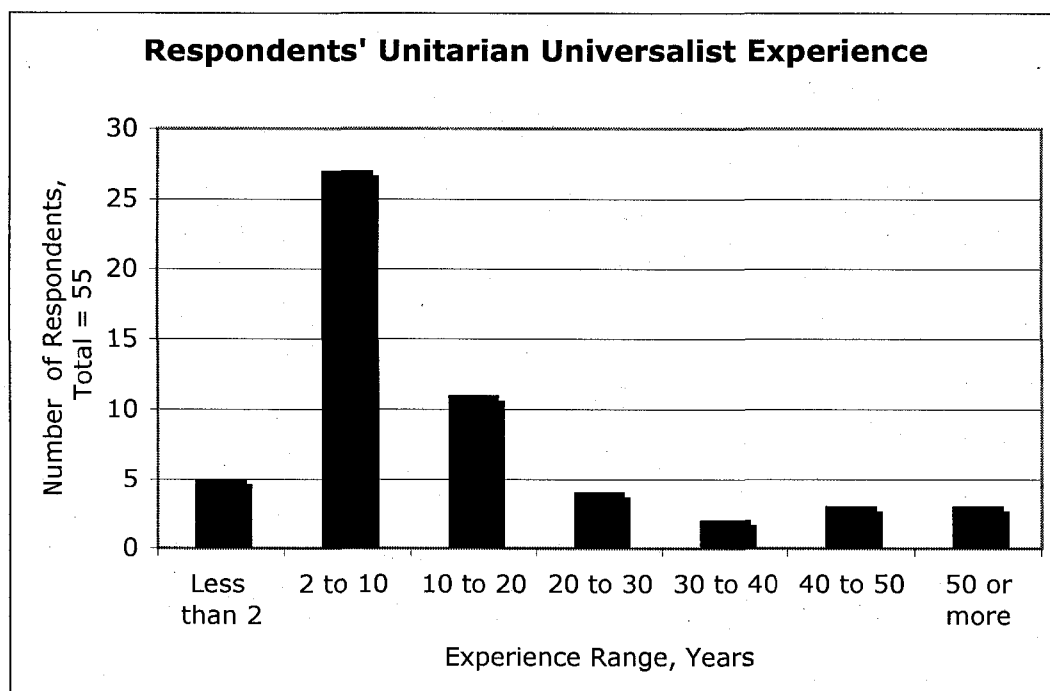
All people in the congregation were encouraged to participate in the survey, but only fifty-five chose to do so. Since the questionnaires were administered verbally by the Lay Ministers, the number of responses was exactly the number that were administered, with only a small number wishing to remain anonymous to me.

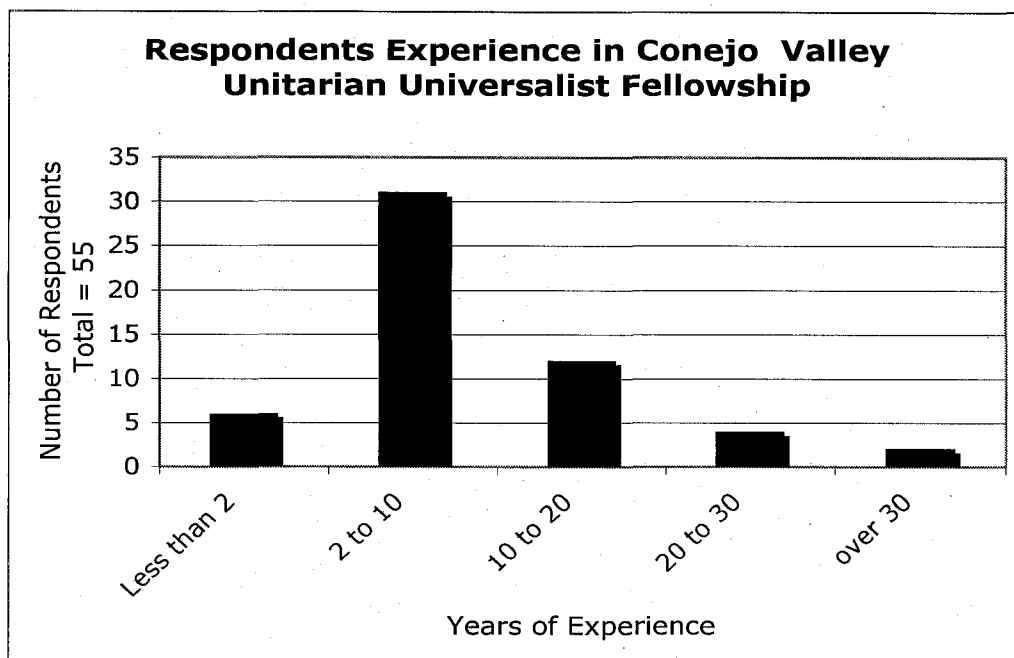
The genders of those in the sample, excluding those who remained anonymous, are 27% male and 64% female, with 9 % who responded anonymously. In the pie chart below those percentages are shown and are compared to those in the second pie chart representing the percentages of those in the entire congregation. Although the percentage of females in the sample is slightly larger than those in the entire congregation, the sample seems fairly representative for an informal survey.





The next set of data indicates the number of years that each respondent said that she or he had been a Unitarian Universalist, with the average being approximately thirteen and a half years. In the succeeding graph, the respondents reported how many years each of them had been a part of the Conejo Valley congregation, an average of approximately eight and a half years.



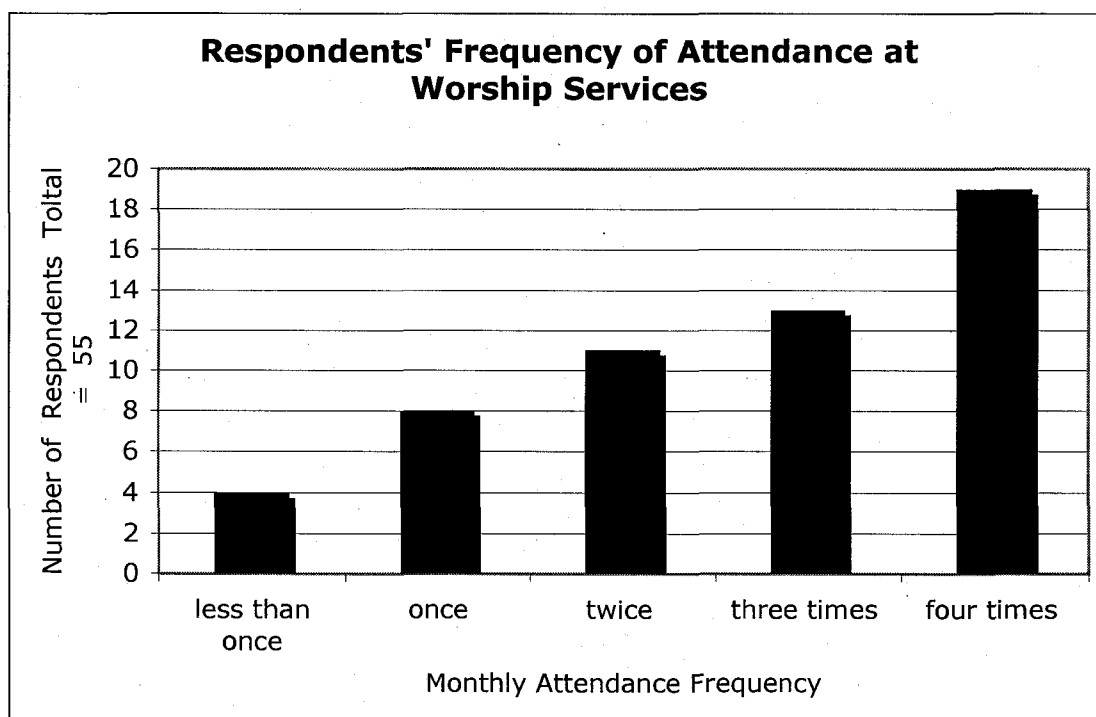


One reasonably predictable thing about a comparison of the raw data above is that while some people reported that they had been Unitarian Universalists longer than they had been connected with the Conejo Valley congregation, others indicated that the two numbers were the same, indicating that this congregation was the first official connection they had had with a UU church. Another statistic that is more interesting to me is that some respondents said that they had actually become Unitarian Universalists after they became connected to this congregation. This response is of interest to me because it suggests that they became a part of our religious community before they really understood what Unitarian Universalism was or accepted it as their faith tradition. A figure that does not appear on either of the graphs, but is intriguing to note, is the people who gave a number of years that they had officially been

Unitarian Universalists but said that they had actually been Unitarian

Universalists all their lives but just didn't know it, a comment that is heard quite frequently in Unitarian Universalist congregations.

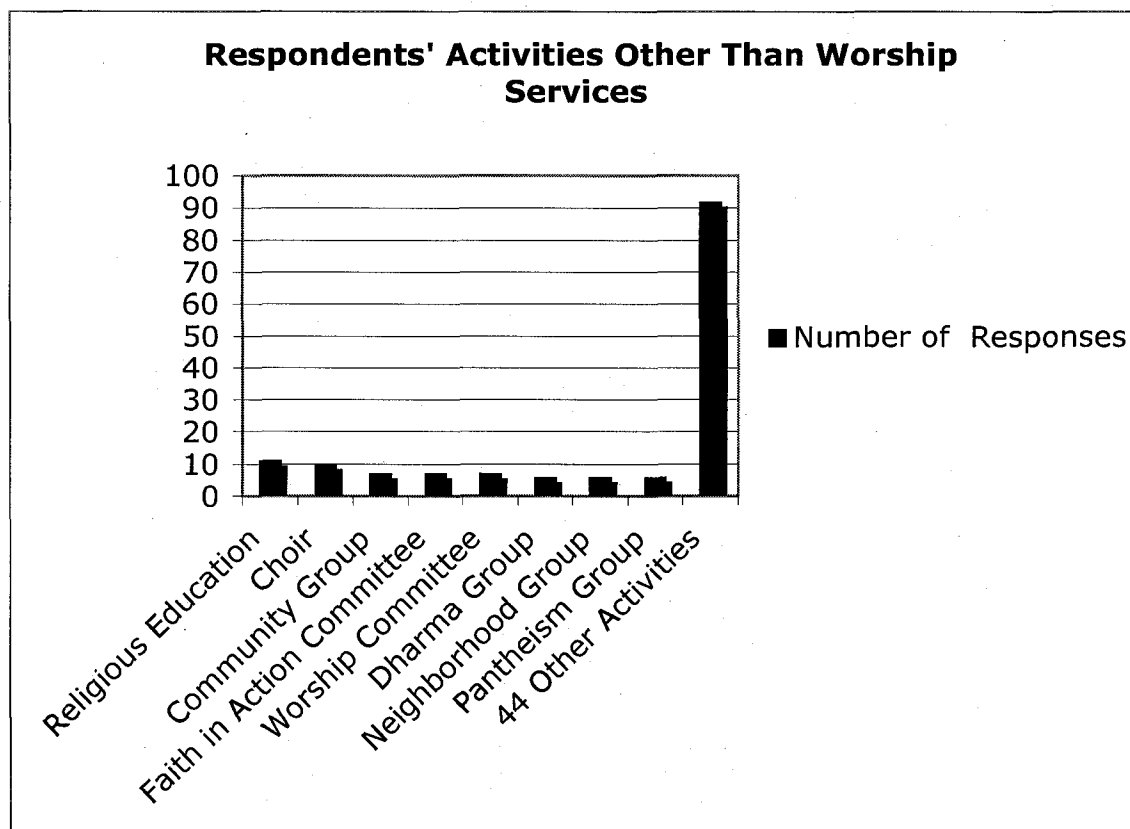
Next is a graph indicating an individual's frequency of attending Sunday worship services each month. From the graph it is clear that, at least among the respondents, attendance on Sunday morning is fairly high, with thirty-two of the fifty-five people surveyed attending at least three times a month. The point of this information is to indicate that these are people who are knowledgeable about the programs in the congregation.



The following graph shows the variety of groups other than Sunday worship in which the people in this sample participate. Although not indicated on the graph, a number of these respondents participate in several groups, and

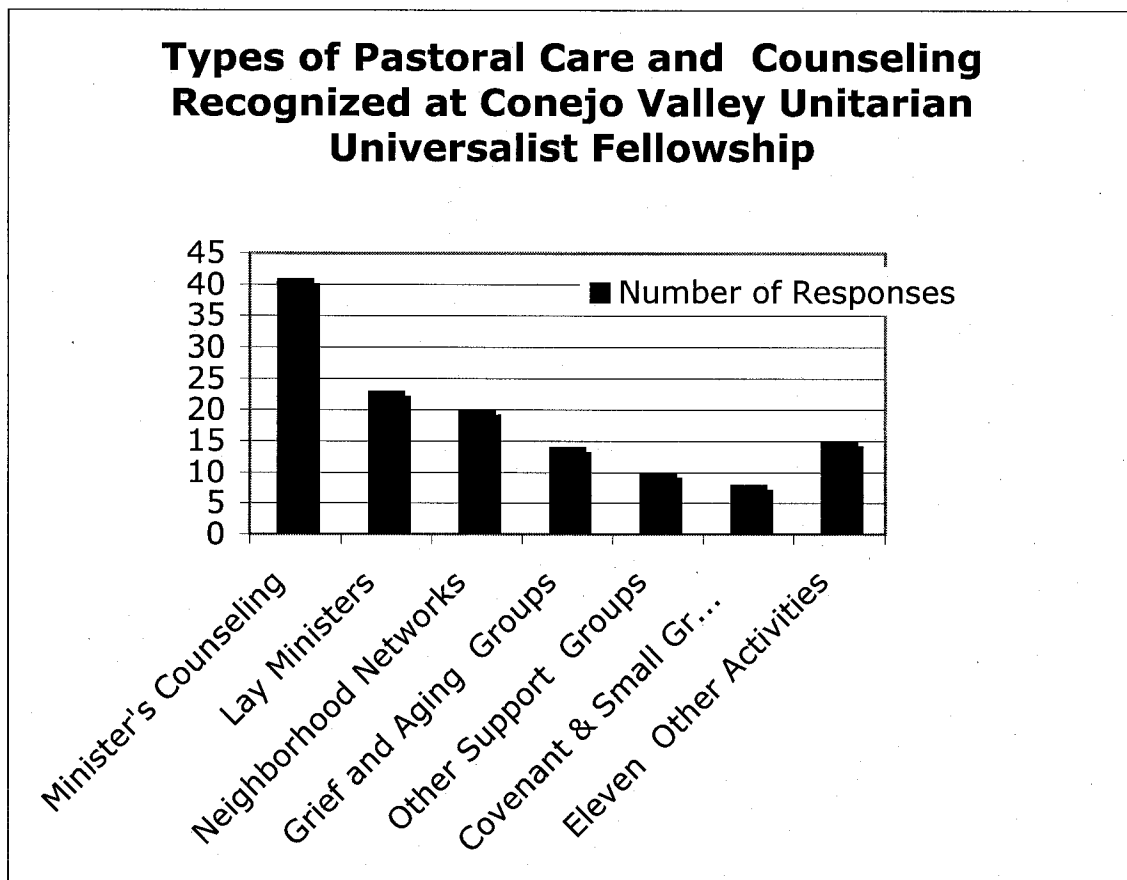


only two said that they did not participate in any other activities. It is safe to say that this group is very actively involved in the programs of the congregation.



Specifically related to the topic of this project, the respondents were asked to share the names of programs in the congregation that they saw as providing pastoral care and counseling in the congregation. Not surprisingly, many saw the minister as someone who provided those services. But there were a number of other lay groups that were recognized as well, including Lay Ministers, Neighborhood Networks, and Covenant Groups, the programs that I have chosen to highlight in this project because of my intimate connection with and knowledge about them. The information about these pastoral care and

counseling opportunities is represented on the graph below. In this graph, although the minister is seen as the greatest single source of pastoral care

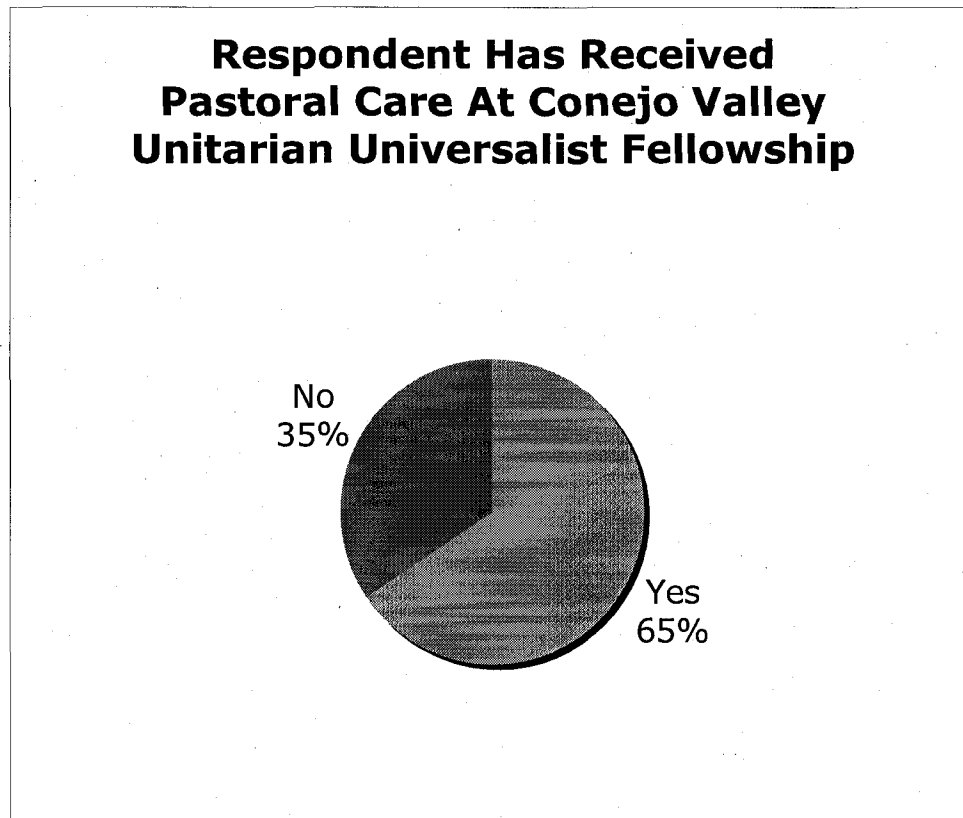


and counseling, it is a great satisfaction to me that the amount of care received from the other sources significantly outweighs the amount of care received from the minister, indicating a strong lay component of pastoral and counseling – a sign that I believe reflects well on the pastoral care plan at this “program size” church.

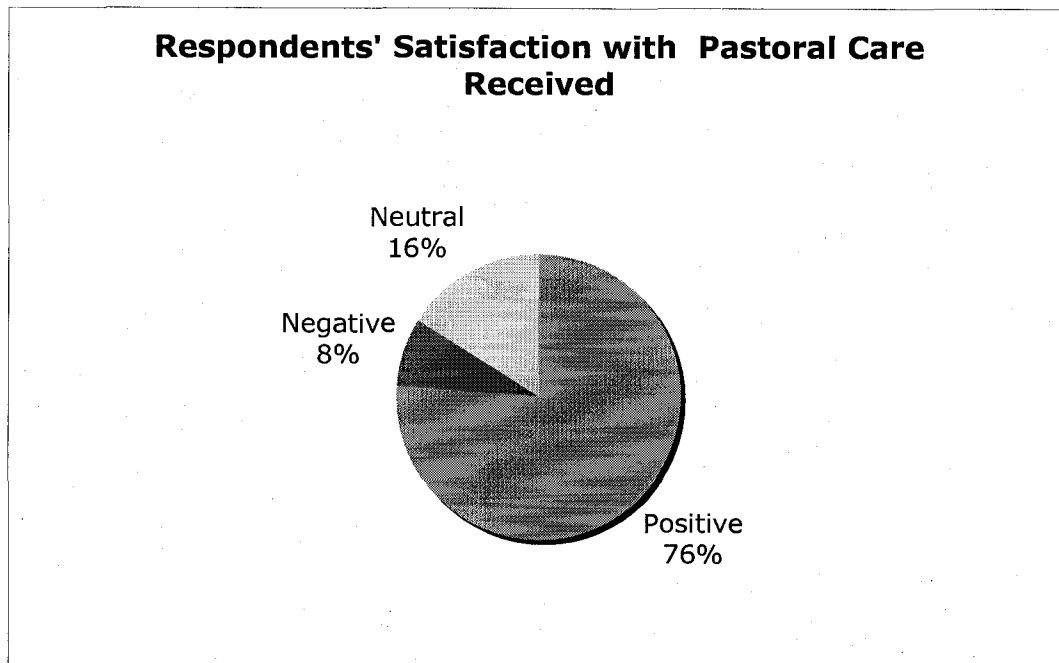
The respondents were then asked how they found out about the various types of pastoral care and counseling and what suggestions they might have for other ways to publicize these activities. While these results do provide practical

ideas to be used by a congregation and will be communicated to the leaders of the Conejo Valley congregation, they are not directly relevant to the thesis of this project and are included in Appendix B of this document.

The graph below indicates the percentage of respondents who had received pastoral care at CVUUF, 65% of the total respondents.

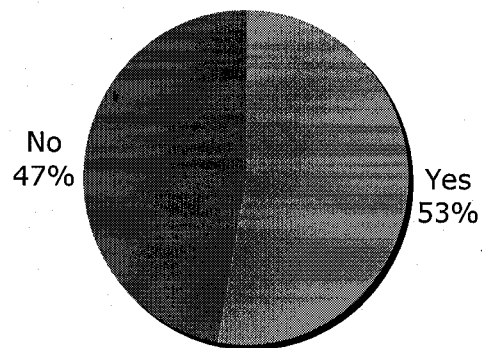


The following graph records the responses of those in the sample group who had received pastoral care with regard to the effectiveness they felt about any of the types of pastoral care that they received. Once again, it is rewarding to see that a large majority feels that their needs are being met.

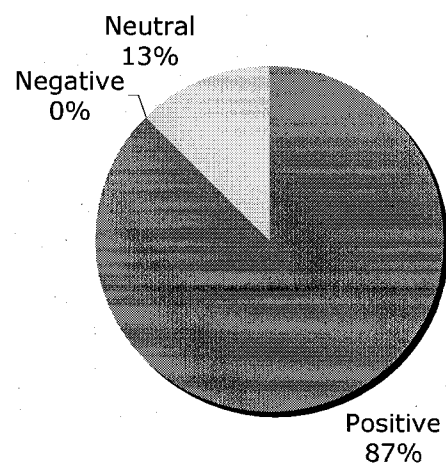


The next two graphs record the responses of all those who had heard about pastoral care for others and, if those people had shared their reactions, whether they had a positive, neutral, or negative response. The results indicate very positive responses from those who had received reactions.

### Respondents' Knowledge of Others Who Have Received Pastoral Care



### Care Satisfaction Reported By Others



The next section of the questionnaire, in which respondents were asked to suggest other ways of providing pastoral care and counseling or make general responses about the topic, were very informative to me but did not provide enough consensus to make them statistically valuable. However, I will share them with the leadership in the congregation and include them in Appendix B of this document.

Three major conclusions that I have come to from the results of the data gathered in this congregation are that: 1.) There is a high degree of awareness of pastoral care and counseling in the Conejo Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship among active participants. 2.) Congregants recognize a great variety of sources of pastoral care and counseling in the congregation. 3.) The satisfaction with pastoral care and counseling in the congregation through all sources is high. As previously stated, my thesis is that pastoral care is a vital part of the mission of any congregation and that shared ministry is an effective way in which pastoral care and counseling can be provided in a “program size” congregation. It seems that, at least in this congregation, this premise has been accepted and congregants are pleased with the results.

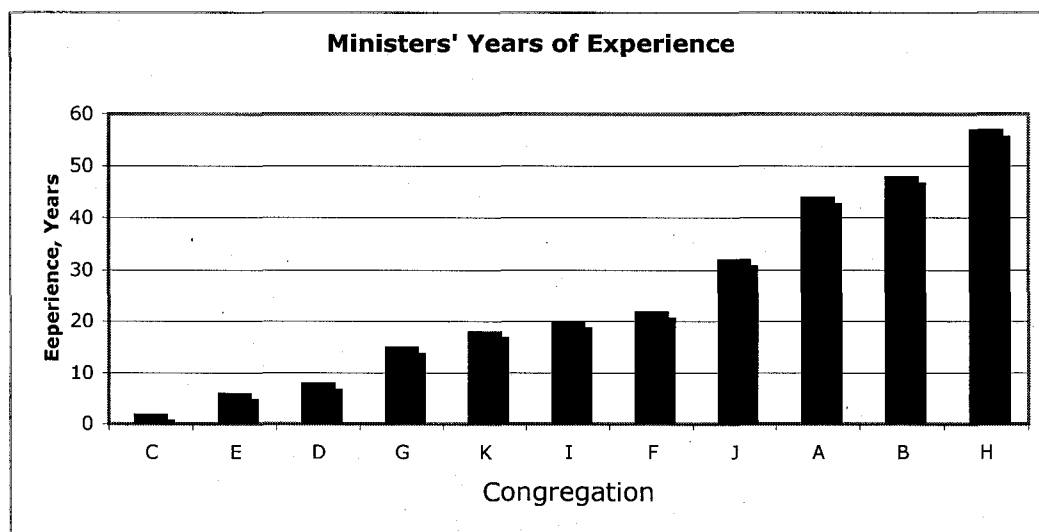
#### Ministerial Interview Data

The next part of this chapter investigates the responses of ministers of other “program size” Unitarian Universalist congregations to determine if their experience corroborates my thesis and, if so, what methods they have discovered through which a shared ministry of pastoral care and counseling can

be effectively created and implemented. The first sections of this investigation establish the context for this information in the lives and experiences of those ministers who were interviewed.

### Years in Professional Ministry

Those interviewed for this study are a diverse group. In terms of years of professional ministry, they include one minister who has been serving congregations for only two years and, at the other end of the spectrum, one who has been serving in professional ministry for fifty-seven years, with a wide range among those between the two. The graph below shows their range of experience.

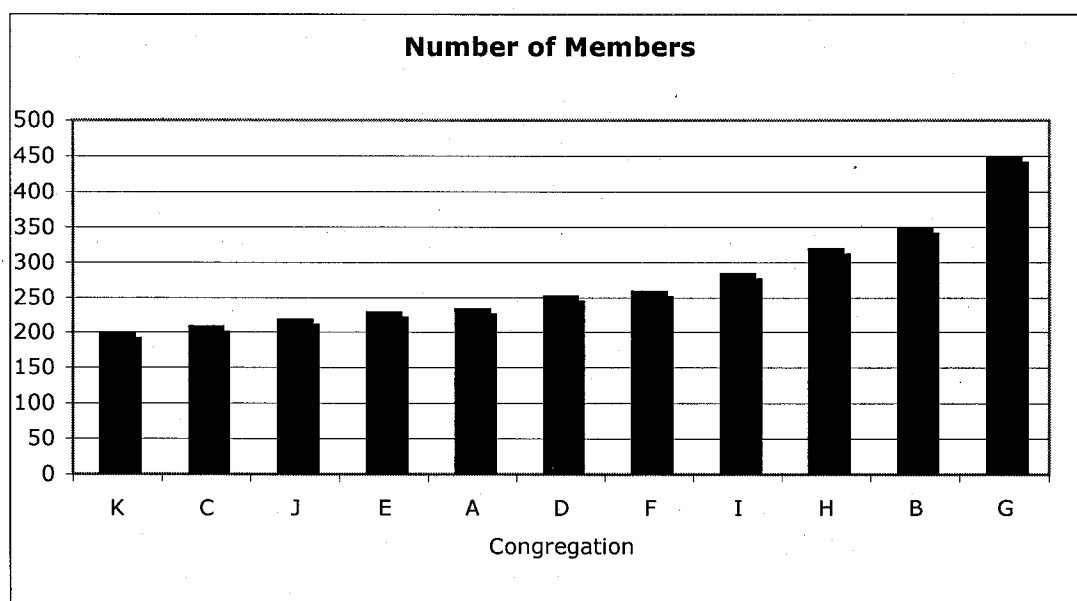


Those interviewed include two ministers who have never had any other profession and those who have also been teachers, therapists, journalists, college professors, juvenile justice workers, managers, counselors, and service

program volunteers. Three in the group have served in other denominations, one for as many as thirty-six years before entering the Unitarian Universalist Ministry. Two are currently interim ministers.

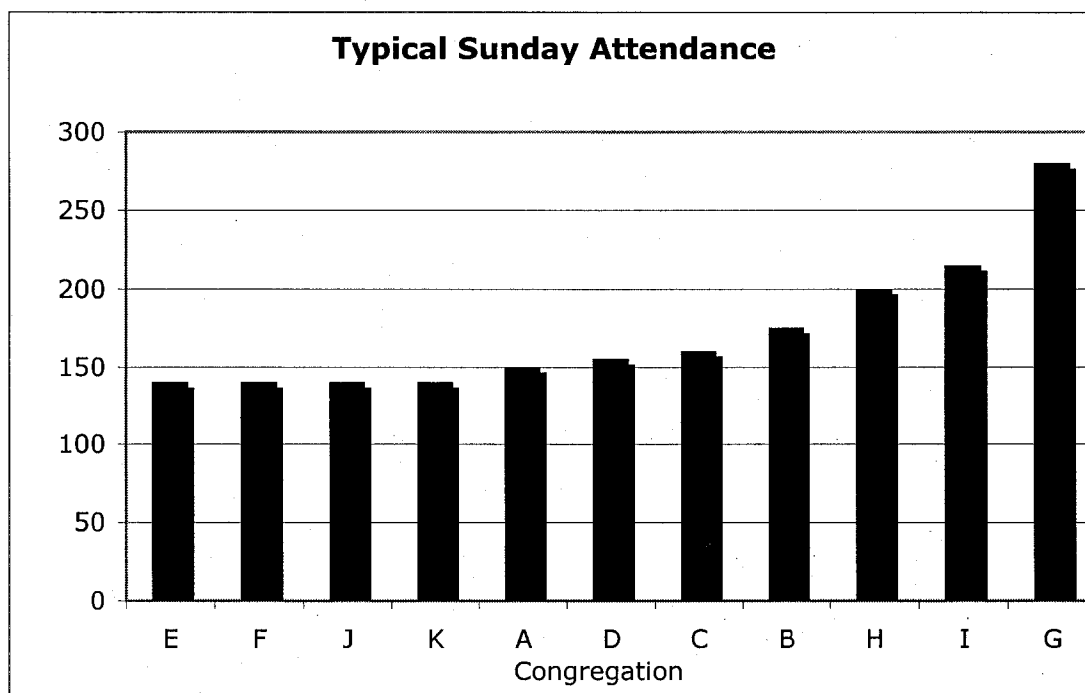
#### Congregational Membership and Sunday Attendance

The membership numbers in these congregations are also diverse, although they all fall into the range that is described by Rothauge and Mann as being in the range of “program size.” The largest congregation in the group has a membership of 450 members, and the smallest of the group has a membership of 200, all reflected in the following graph.





In their typical Sunday morning attendance, including children and youth, however, their numbers are much more homogeneous. Four of the ministers reported attendance of 140 people, just under the number that officially qualifies as “program size”; the church with the largest membership has reported 280 in attendance on a typical Sunday morning. This information appears in the following graph.



#### Ministers' Definitions of Pastoral Care and Counseling

In terms of their definitions of pastoral care, most of these ministers have very similar ideas; their definitions are closely related to those in the first chapter of this project. Virtually all of the interviewed ministers also describe pastoral counseling as being of longer duration and greater intensity, focused toward a treatment goal, often related to spiritual issues, and requiring greater professional training and expertise than pastoral care. Their responses varied in

terms of the number of sessions that they might spend on such counseling, but all said that after a minimal number of sessions (no more than three), they would make a referral to a therapist or other professional.

### Primary Pastoral Care and Counseling Needs

The pastoral care and counseling needs in the congregations these ministers are serving cover a wide variety of issues. However, they seem to break down into three basic categories: aging and health, relationships, and spiritual growth.

In terms of age-related factors, several ministers say that seniors in their congregations have concerns about aging and ill health and about end of life issues for themselves or their spouses, even when they have family members close by. However, one of these ministers is aware that these issues could be masking others such as concerns about broken relationships with family or friends. Another minister says, "You just need to love them," explaining that members (particularly the older ones) crave support that seems to have been missing in the past. In yet another congregation, the most frequently presented issues are health needs of many people, regardless of age.

With regard to relationship issues, one minister indicates that intra-family and intra-congregational conflict is an issue needing pastoral care and counseling. In another congregation, the minister most often faces concerns about life adjustment issues relating to work, family, and relationships – sometimes resulting in depression, neuroses, or even psychoses. A related

response includes family challenges covering a full spectrum of issues. Two similar concerns are about stress and relationship problems that could manifest as communication issues, difficulty in finding intimacy with others, and consideration of divorce. Yet another minister feels that the most pressing issues are around connecting in a loving way with other people in situations of grief, economic problems, and family relationship issues. Unfortunately, this minister's experience has been that these issues are often not expressed explicitly, so they are difficult to address.

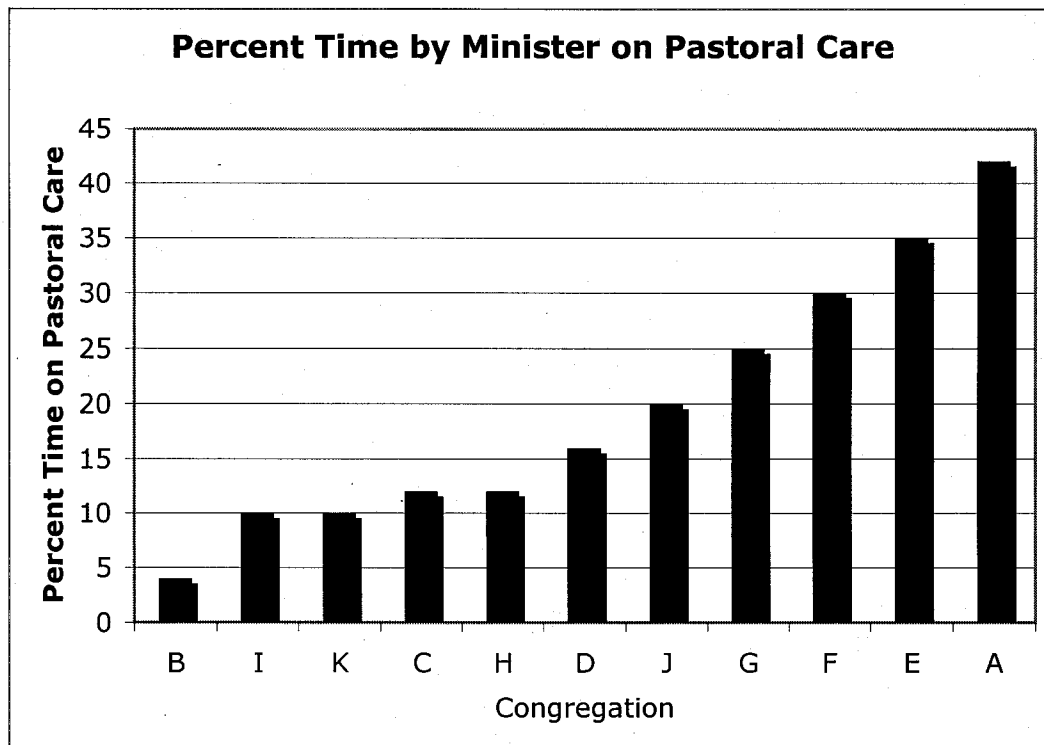
On the subject of spiritual issues, two ministers include parishioners' concerns with how to grow spiritually. Another minister finds that congregants seem to lack time to take care of themselves and to find opportunities for introspection, sometimes leading to other presenting problems.

Given all of these issues, pastoral care and counseling in present-day Unitarian Universalist congregations in the Pacific South West District certainly present huge challenges to these ministers of congregations of between 200 to 450 members. How do they deal with these demands? A look at the weekly percentage of time that these ministers spend on pastoral care and counseling provides a variety of results.

#### Percentage of Ministerial Time Spent on Pastoral Care and Counseling

When asked what percentage of their time was spent in pastoral care and counseling, including informal encounters, these eleven ministers reported a wide range of time spent on this area of their ministry. Among these ministers,

the percentage of time spent in pastoral care and counseling ranged from a low of 4% to a high of 40 to 45%, with a spectrum of percentages in between, illustrated by the following graph.



One of the questions that I hoped to answer in this project was what caused such a great disparity in terms of the time spent on pastoral care and counseling by ministers. One possibility that I expected was that some of these ministers did not recognize the value of pastoral care and counseling. However, to my surprise, that does not seem to be true from my interviews with them. In fact, seven of the eleven interviewed ministers say that they find pastoral care and counseling satisfying or even very satisfying. And, even among the four who say that it is not their main source of satisfaction, they feel that pastoral care and

counseling is an important part of ministry and that they do it well, particularly in certain types of situations.

As a second alternative, I expected that perhaps personal characteristics could explain the differences in providing pastoral care and counseling in “program size” Unitarian Universalist congregations. For example, I anticipated that those ministers who expressed great frustration in relation to their pastoral care and counseling experiences would be the ones who spent less time on that area of their ministry, but the information in the next section of this chapter shows that expectation to be unfounded. Although there is no way to measure the degree of frustration expressed by these ministers, some of the ministers who express the greatest personal satisfaction with their pastoral care spend a large percentage of their time in pastoral care and counseling while others in that same group spend a very small percentage of their time with that area of ministry. Likewise, the ministers who express the greatest personal frustration in their pastoral care could be found at both ends of the spectrum in terms of the percentage of time they spend in that part of their ministry.

The frustrations associated with pastoral care and counseling are both unique to some ministers and shared by several ministers, but their relationship to the percentage of time spent by the minister on pastoral care and counseling, shown in the graph above, does not appear to be related to their frustration in any predictable way. The variety of these frustrations is described in the summary that follows.

### Ministerial Frustrations Related to Pastoral Care and Counseling

One minister said that his major frustration was that UUs were so independent-minded that they often did not let the minister know when they were in need of pastoral care until after the fact. Related to the previous comment, another minister was also frustrated by the fact that people in the congregation often didn't share their needs with her. But this minister did not see it as her role to press them for information about their problems. Similarly, yet another minister, who reported that Unitarian Universalists were so indirect that they were often not straightforward about what they needed, said that she was consequently frustrated by the fact that it was difficult to know what a minister could do that was helpful.

In contrast to these colleagues, the next minister interviewed, who said that he had no major frustrations related to pastoral care and counseling in the congregation that he served, reported that he had found Unitarian Universalists especially eager and more quickly devoted to caring support than for many other opportunities for congregational service. So, it would seem from the responses above that while some Unitarian Universalists are reluctant to seek help, many are very willing to provide it.

In seeming contradiction to the response in the previous paragraph, there were two other ministers in the group who were frustrated by the lack of adequate support teams for pastoral care and counseling by members of the congregation, who seemed to believe that the minister should take care of that

aspect of congregational life. Although both of these congregations had programs for providing the basic physical needs for parishioners, such as food, clothing, transportation, and adequate housing, there seemed to be little interest in providing for the larger spectrum of needs in the congregation. One of these ministers reported implementing a very effective pastoral associates program in a previous congregation that he had served but said that he had too many issues to deal with in this congregation to develop such a program with no other professional staff support. The other minister was also frustrated with the fact that congregants seemed to expect the minister to know about needs even though she had not been directly told about the issues.

Another frustration was revealed by several ministers, one of whom found that the time and intensity of the encounters related to pastoral care and counseling taxed her ability to provide for all the needs of a growing congregation. She was concerned that more people would get less as the congregation continued to grow since she was neither willing nor able to increase the number of hours she spent on these needs. Connected to the frustration of the previous interviewee was a minister who said that his major frustration was the difficulty of “living in the sorrow” so much of the time because of the illness and death of so many in his congregation of older adults and his concern over not having enough time to provide the amount of care needed, often because of not hearing about the needs of a congregant soon enough.

Related to the two previous responses, another minister echoed frustration with the amount of time available in her schedule for pastoral care and counseling. She said that there were too many members in the congregation to provide effective pastoral care without help and that other pressing needs of the congregation could take time away from the time available for pastoral care. She was particularly concerned with reaching out to and staying in touch with housebound members and was frustrated because of the difficulty with getting emergency contact information in light of current privacy laws. A similar concern was reported by yet another minister who was frustrated by the fact that she did not have enough time to check out hunches about care and counseling needs because there was too much else to do. She also felt that others in the congregation did not seem to value pastoral care and counseling as much as she did. However, in contrast to all of these reports of inadequate time, one of the interviewed ministers believed that even when a minister could not do as much visiting because of church size, he or she could still call congregants on the telephone.

The frustration mentioned by the largest number of ministers in the sample was the difficulty of finding out about the pastoral care and counseling needs within the congregation. The second largest number of ministers expressed frustration with the lack of time in their ministries available for pastoral care and counseling. The third most frequently mentioned frustrations (shared by two of the ministers) were the lack of support teams to help them in



their pastoral care and counseling efforts and being overwhelmed with the intensity of the encounters with parishioners.

Although not all of these concerns relate specifically to problems connected to the size of the congregation, several of the ministers mentioned that factor directly. It is certainly easy to see that providing pastoral care and counseling amid the difficulties related to sharing needs, limited time, adequate support, and emotional intensity would become more difficult as the size of the congregation needing care increased. However, additional research is needed to investigate that theory.

#### Methods of Pastoral Care by Laity

Methods of pastoral care by laity included a great variety but also shared many similarities. Among the types of pastoral care reported by the ministers in this study were included: caring committees or groups to take care of physical needs such as meals, food and other shopping, child and elder care, or transportation when they were asked and the recruitment of others in the congregation to help (all congregations had some type of group to provide for these physical needs); leadership as well as supportive roles in the pastoral care program; trained and empathetic listeners; lay pastoral care groups (both men and women) recruited, trained, and supervised by the minister for two-year terms to visit congregants in their homes or in hospitals and provide for other pastoral care needs; pastoral care visitors to be ministerial representatives when the minister is out of town or otherwise unavailable; Covenant Groups to provide

care and support for their members; men's and women's support groups; Congregation Nurse Program, connected to a local hospital, led by an R.N. and other nurses in the congregation to provide blood pressure screening and flu vaccines, a walking group for health, visits to people with health needs at home and in the hospital, and collaboration with the minister (unique to one congregation in the sample); regionalized small interest groups that have social events throughout the year, and also provide for the needs of those in their groups with visits, food, and transportation when called upon; mental and other health care providers within the congregation who can be called on by the minister as needed; two-week "on-call" schedule for a group that is trained to provide pastoral care and visits to congregants with a regular list of scheduled contacts; training of pastoral care providers through local hospitals and community service organizations; individuals in the congregation who provide food and other needs informally; small spiritual growth and worship groups; and small facilitated groups formed yearly to concentrate on deepening spirituality and worship.

#### Ministerial Evaluation of Effectiveness for Lay Programs

Of the ministers in this sample, most seemed to believe that the programs now in place in their congregations were functioning at least adequately. Some expressed the following concerns: the minister seemed to be doing most of the pastoral care; young families were not being well served; more people in the congregation needed to be involved in providing care; some

in the congregation will not accept care that is offered; some of the caring groups did not seem to be doing a very complete job of pastoral care.

But several of the ministers were exceptionally pleased with some of the programs currently functioning in their congregations. The particular programs that these ministers felt to be most effective were Covenant Groups, "Finding Heart Groups," Regionalized Interest Groups, and a Congregational Nurse Program.

Covenant Groups were mentioned by a number of the ministers as being very effective ways of providing pastoral care. These groups are described more fully in Chapter 6 of this project.

Finding Heart Groups are the strongest pastoral care and counseling program in one congregation, and the minister said that people look forward to these groups being formed each year. They are created in this congregation after a service on the last Sunday in September. Five or six groups of eight to ten people are formed each year to avoid the groups becoming too cliquish, as they might if they were continued from year to year. Facilitators are assigned to each group by the minister, and the groups meet for six consecutive weeks. At that point, they can decide whether to continue; and they usually choose to continue. They are similar to Covenant Groups; but, according to the minister, they are more concerned with deepening spirituality and worship rather than the wider range of topics in Covenant Groups. The members also engage in pastoral care with those in their group around issues of death and other issues.

The facilitators are trained by the minister and the program chair, using an orientation book developed by the minister.

Regionalized Interest Groups were also mentioned by two ministers as being effective. This type of group will be described fully in Chapter 7 of this project.

The Congregation Nurse program, noted in a previous section, has, according to the minister, changed the ethos in the congregation and encouraged the members of the congregation to become aware of the connection between spiritual, physical, and psychological health. She says that It has encouraged the idea of “being well.”

#### Methods of Pastoral Care and Counseling by Ministers

Methods that these ministers shared about their own pastoral care and counseling included a large variety of practices that can be broken into two basic types. The first type was care for individuals, and the second type was the creation and administration of group pastoral care programs.

Methods included in the first type that were referenced by many of the ministers included calling and visiting, sometimes at lunch or coffee, and generally being available; providing pastoral care in times of need; calling on parishioners in order to cover those things that the lay pastoral groups were not doing, particularly the chronic problems; counseling with individuals on a limited basis; furnishing referrals to trained pastoral counselors or health care providers in the larger community; and attending visitor orientation meetings to provide

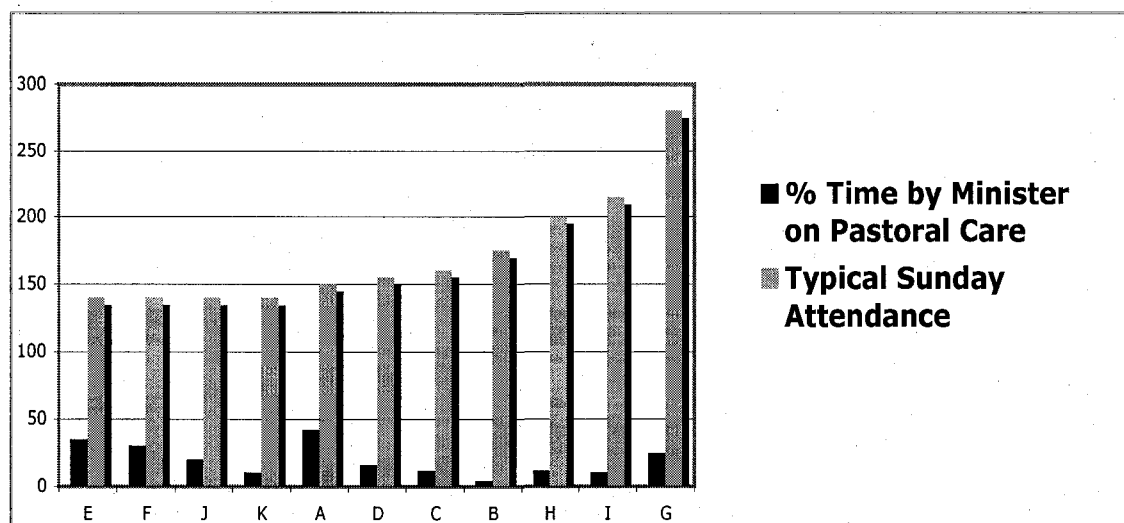
pastoral care by helping those who attend to heal from their past religious wounds.

Methods included in the second type (group creation and administration) that were mentioned by a number of these ministers were aimed at encouraging a collaborative, shared-ministry model of mutual planning, review and involvement with lay participants in caring ministry; meeting with senior adults three or four times a year to share ideas and insights; meeting with older members of the congregation in a local retirement complex to share stories of their lives; taking responsibility for selecting, meeting and working with Covenant Group facilitators; acting as the leader of a lay pastoral care group and connecting to all pastoral care activities; choosing, training, and supervising lay pastoral care providers; making referrals to and keeping in regular communication with congregational care providers; organizing a pastoral care group to provide calls and coordinate food, cards, transportation, and visits; working closely with the caring and concerns committee; developing small groups yearly for more intimate connections; and organizing neighborhood caring groups to provide for those in their geographical areas.

#### Ministerial Data Analysis

Given the data included in this chapter so far, there seems to be a trend toward shared ministry in all of the congregations studied. And, looking at the graph below, there also appears to be a definite relationship in most of the congregations between typical Sunday morning attendance and a decreased

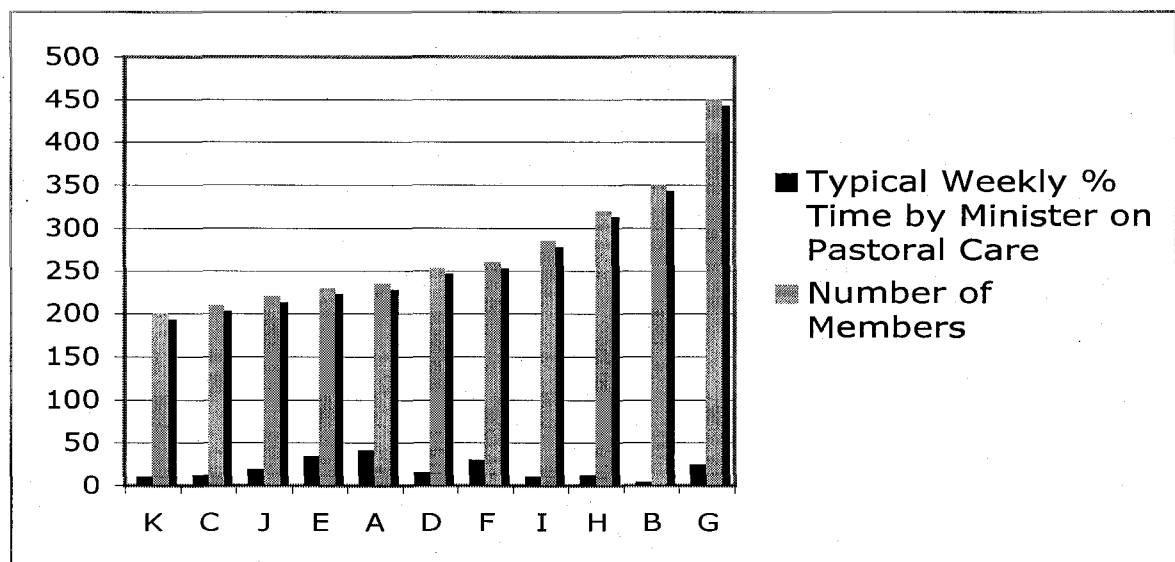
percentage of time spent by the minister on pastoral care and counseling rather than between church membership and the percentage of time spent by the same minister on pastoral care and counseling. That is to say that as the



church attendance increases in numbers, the percentage of the minister's time spent in pastoral care decreases. And anecdotally, as reported in this chapter, those churches with higher Sunday morning attendance also seem to have more extensive programs of lay-led pastoral care and counseling. Although there is not a totally symmetrical relationship between church attendance and the percentage of time spent by the minister in pastoral care and counseling, there are only two of the eleven ministers in this study that do not follow that trend within a reasonable degree of variance. They are churches A and G on the graph above.

Because of my knowledge of those two churches, I believe that the deviations can be easily explained. Church A is being served by a newly assigned interim minister where there has apparently been no history of an

extensive lay-led program of pastoral care and where this minister has had a life-long commitment to strong, minister-driven pastoral care and counseling. This minister also expects that the percentage of pastoral care and counseling will decrease as the congregation is encouraged to become more active in that area. Church G, on the other hand, has had the same settled minister for the last three years and has had rapid growth during that period. This minister,



along with lay pastoral care leadership has also very recently developed a pastoral care program that is expected to relieve the minister of a significant amount of the pastoral care that she has been doing.

In the graph above, showing a comparison between membership and percentage of pastoral care and counseling by the minister, the same two congregations are higher than most of the others in the amount of ministerial time devoted to pastoral care and counseling with one exception (congregation F) explained, at least partially, by the great difference in that congregation

between membership and Sunday morning attendance. However, there is no trend in the other congregations that shows an inverse relationship between increasing membership and the amount of pastoral care by the minister. Given that fact, there seems to be evidence that lay-led pastoral care programs are more directly linked to Sunday attendance rather than membership.

But even if these differences between attendance, membership, and pastoral care time spent by ministers in “program size” church had not been graphically represented above, there still seems to be considerable anecdotal evidence to support the idea that an increasing number of people to be served in a congregation can mean seriously debilitating stress for the minister when she or he tries to be disproportionately responsible for pastoral care and counseling. In fact, according to information by Roy Oswald and Robert Friedrich, a minister serving a congregation with over 150 active members, however “active” is measured, becomes increasingly stressed with each new member added to the congregation. These authors even say that such a minister can seriously halt a congregation’s growth because she or he does not feel comfortable serving a larger congregation.<sup>1</sup> One of the ministers in this sample supported that point of view in relation to pastoral care and counseling by saying that when a minister is unwilling to give up the role of primary pastoral care provider, it stymies the growth of the congregation and robs the members of the congregation of the opportunity to be a part of the caring ministry that

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<sup>1</sup> Roy M. Oswald and Robert E. Friedrich, Jr., Discerning Your Congregation’s Future: A Strategic and Spiritual Approach (Herndon, Va.: Alban Institute, 1996), 152.



contributes to its being a “beloved community,” defined by Unitarian Universalist minister Tom Owen-Towle as a place where all God’s creatures feel welcomed “into its compassionate embrace.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Tom Owen-Towle, Growing a Beloved Community (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2004), xi.

## **Chapter 5**

### **First Model for Effective Pastoral Care – Covenant Groups**

There are a number of ways in which pastoral care can be provided in a “program size” congregation, and this chapter describes one of the most effective of those programs in detail. The method of pastoral care that is explored in this chapter is through the formation of covenant groups. Unitarian Universalist minister Rev. Robert Hill, one of the chief proponents of covenant groups, wonders in print just how many congregants a single minister can provide for and responds that she or he can reasonably serve 125 to 140 adults at most.<sup>1</sup> It is notable that his number is remarkably close to what Rothauge and Mann have called “program size.”

Consequently, the focus of this chapter will be to show the ways in which the development of Covenant Groups in a congregation can greatly enhance pastoral care and counseling in a “program size” congregation. It is my contention that the establishment of these groups is a powerful vehicle that can serve to enrich and sustain a vital program of pastoral care through shared ministry. These groups also open the door for more meaningful individual pastoral counseling by the minister outside of the groups, by encouraging a parishioner’s openness to sharing his or her joys and concerns with others in a safe environment.

This movement has also been embraced by a number of the congregations in the sample I interviewed, and they too have found them to be a

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<sup>1</sup> Hill, 74.

rich source of significant pastoral care. In fact some have as many as ten or more groups in their congregations.

### Background Needs and History

Intentional small group meetings for study and discussion, by various names, have been a part of church life in numerous faith traditions for a very long time and for a number of purposes. But, at least in Unitarian Universalist congregations, the intentional development of Covenant Groups during the last decade or more has been, it seems to me and others, the result of two perceived needs: the need for a sense of community and the need for a spiritual connection with something beyond ourselves, in an group of limited size, where intimate connections can be made over an extended time period. In fact, much of the work of twentieth century Unitarian Universalist theologian James Luther Adams centers around the idea of looking for a place to belong, which he calls intimacy, and an opportunity to seek meaning in the space between being born and having to die, described as ultimacy, in all of our voluntary associations.<sup>2</sup>

Second, the need for a renewed sense of the holy and the opportunity for people to get in closer touch with the spiritual part of themselves that may have become lost in the mundane and materialistic activities of daily life is clear from even casual conversations with new Unitarian Universalist members today. Two decades ago, new members were coming to Unitarian Universalist churches because they had rejected the religious traditions of their past. But today they are looking for something more. In fact, there is a real hunger for spirituality

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<sup>2</sup> Adams, Examined Faith, 20.

among those coming into Unitarian Universalist congregations today - a trend that has seemingly developed, for reasons that are not totally clear, in the last ten to fifteen years.

Not unexpectedly, those are the very needs that Rev. Glenn Turner, the now-retired District Executive of the Northeast District of the Unitarian Universalist Association, began to address in 1996, and first officially presented at a Unitarian Universalist General Assembly in 1998, through his development of the Covenant Group concept.

In the preface to his handbook on what he calls "Small Group Ministry," Turner writes: "In the past several years, the concept of a church ministry based on relationally-oriented small groups has captured the imaginations of Unitarian Universalists across North America." He goes on to say that Unitarian Universalists throughout the country are expressing a greater desire for closer connections with others and for spiritual growth. Further, he points out that increase of individualism in this country has led to a breakdown of community and a reduced participation in group activities, a trend that he believes to be a danger to our shared values and our communal and individual sense of wellbeing.<sup>3</sup>

Turner writes that Unitarian Universalism has been influenced by this cultural shift and reminds us that putting people on committees does not serve to keep them energized and committed. For that, he says that we need to

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<sup>3</sup> Glenn H. Turner, "Designing and Implementing a Small Group Ministry Focus for Your Congregation," accessed 29 Oct.; available from the author at [gturner2@maine.rr.com](mailto:gturner2@maine.rr.com), 1.

address the basic spiritual and intimacy needs of our members, something he believes we can do through “covenant groups” or what he calls “small group ministry.”<sup>4</sup>

Supporting this idea, Hill wrote in 2003 that covenant groups can be a transformative way for us to understand ourselves as we listen to and share with others.<sup>5</sup> He also believes that these groups can help us to keep our current members in vital relationship with each other and welcome those people who come to Unitarian Universalist congregations looking for a safe place to ask questions and share in supportive community.<sup>6</sup>

Further, Thandeka, a professor at Meadville Lombard Theological School, a Unitarian Universalist seminary in Chicago, sees Covenant Group work as “spiritual aerobics.” She says, “It’s a workout with an attitude, a three-part routine for community builders.”<sup>7</sup> She believes that each group meeting has what she calls a “warm-up,” in which members of the group look inside themselves for stories that they share in safety with others who listen with attention and compassion. Then, she says that there is a “full workout” where all are engaged in an energetic interchange of thoughts and reactions and the opportunity to expand their ideas into action in the congregation and the larger community. Finally, she says that there is a “wind-down” or reentry into the

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<sup>4</sup> Turner, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Hill, 96.

<sup>6</sup> Hill, xvii – xviii.

<sup>7</sup> Thandeka, “Covenant Group Work: A Spiritual Exercise to Heal, Transform, and Repair the World,” A Covenant Group Source Book, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (Chicago: Center for Community Values, 2001), 20.

group where those in the group join in sharing their reactions to their experience in a caring and respectful way. At its best, Thandeka believes that "Covenant Group work heals, transforms, and repairs the world . . . in which participants practice what they preach -- right relationship."<sup>8</sup>

### Formation and Styles of Covenant Groups

The specific ways in which Covenant Groups have been formed is as varied as the congregations in which they have been developed, but one common characteristic of such formation seems to be a felt need by a group of people in the congregation for the enhancement of their relational and spiritual growth and the importance of that growth for their religious community. And it is very clear, according to a number of sources, that the commitment of the minister, when there is one in a congregation, is vital to their success,<sup>9</sup> because the minister's support enhances the credibility of the program and encourages others to participate. Further, the minister's involvement allows the idea of covenant to be integrated with other programs of the church in a more effective way.

With these prerequisites in place, a group of committed people has to embrace the concept of Covenant Groups as the most effective way to achieve their goal of relational and spiritual growth and to develop a plan through which the formation of these groups can be implemented. Their plan may be to have a "pilot group" meet for an extended period of time before forming other groups or

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<sup>8</sup> Thandeka, "Covenant Group Work: A Spiritual Exercise to Heal, Transform, and Repair the World," 20 – 21.

<sup>9</sup> Turner, 3.

to move almost immediately into the formation of these groups, based on the amount of interest that is generated. After sufficient interest has been developed, the ways in which individual groups are formed can be based on geographical location, meeting times, random or planned assignments by the pilot group or the minister, or other agreed-upon characteristics.

However, even with all of this variety in the ways in which they are initially developed, there are certain commonalities that most Covenant Groups share.

Turner writes that Covenant Groups should:

- Meet at least twice a month
- Provide opportunities for check-in and spiritual growth
- Have a facilitator and an intern facilitator for each group
- Be open to welcoming new members and forming new groups.
- Include monthly meetings for facilitators with the minister or leader for continued training and support.
- Include the idea of service to the congregation or larger community.<sup>10</sup>

My own experience with these groups in the congregation that I serve leads me to comment about these guidelines by Turner in the paragraphs that follow.

Although many of the proponents of Covenant Groups believe that they should meet only once a month, there are varieties of opinions about how many times a month would be the optimum – once, twice, or every week. While some say that the more frequently a group meets the greater the benefit, others point

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<sup>10</sup> Turner, 2.

out that with the busy schedules of most people in congregations today, meeting too frequently may cause an undue hardship on some in the group. It is my experience that each congregation, and perhaps even each group within a congregation, will have to decide what frequency seems best for their needs, but the Covenant Groups in our congregation have decided that once a month is as often as they are able to gather.

On the subject of whether these groups should be primarily topic driven or more concerned with individual spiritual concerns, there are also varying points of view. Some believe that the facilitator should keep the group engaged mainly in a discussion of the topic. Other advocates suggest that the discussion of profound life issues in a spiritual context is what distinguishes these groups from others in a congregation and that the purpose of the topic is to help the group to stay focused. However, it is my experience that a slavish concern with staying on the topic can keep the group from going in a direction that might prove very rich for both the relational and the spiritual purposes of the group. On the other hand, leading the group into an unfocused discussion of personal spiritual issues could leave many in the group frustrated with the lack of a comprehensible direction. So I would say that the facilitator and the group are the best judges of when it is appropriate to deviate from a topic for their mutual benefit and that probably a combination of discussion about a topic and its spiritual implications would be most satisfying.



A related issue is whether each of the groups in a given congregation should focus on the same topic, chosen either by the minister or the facilitation team for each meeting, or whether each group should select its own topic. The advantage of sharing the same topic for all groups could be a sense of the connection among the groups and possible discussion of the topic with members of other groups outside of the meeting, as long as confidentiality is maintained. The disadvantage is that limiting all the groups to the same topic does not allow as much flexibility for groups to respond to the needs and personalities of their constituents. Once again, my experience suggests that individual congregations and Covenant Group teams leaders would have to make decisions about such issues for themselves. Our congregation has chosen to have each group decide on its own topics.

On the subject of whether facilitators of groups should all be Unitarian Universalists, my conviction is that, although members of the groups could certainly be non-Unitarian Universalists, the facilitators would need to be Unitarian Universalists, selected and trained by the minister or some other professional in the congregation. I am convinced that since Covenant Groups are to be church sponsored activities, with their accompanying liability issues, and because the groups are expected to adhere to the Unitarian Universalist Principles and Purposes, they should be facilitated by those who are most in tune with Unitarian Universalism.

In terms of the commitment to make Covenant Groups open and welcoming to new members, some advocates suggest including an empty chair in the circle at each meeting to remind everyone that the group is open to newcomers until the maximum number is reached. Most of the writers agree that a new group should be formed when the number of members gets to no more than ten or twelve, in order to allow for maximum interaction in each group. Although I am not sure that an actual chair is necessary to support the idea of inclusiveness, my experience leads me to encourage groups in welcoming new members, even though it may temporarily change the dynamics of the group. If the greatest spiritual and pastoral care is to be experienced, Covenant Groups cannot simply become cliques where new people or new outlooks are excluded.

However, the process of how to bring about the formation of a new group has been the subject of considerable discussion among both writers and participants. The original proposal by Turner and others was that the facilitator of the original group would hand over the guidance of that group to the apprentice facilitator and then form a new group, perhaps with a few members of the original group, and that newcomers would then join both groups.

But the practicality of that plan has been called into question in recent years by the experience of actual groups who have attempted that method. Once people in a group have become bonded, these splits seem to have been very difficult. A more recent suggestion is that new facilitators would be trained and new groups formed without splitting the original group, a plan which I

believe to have a great deal of merit so that the members of the group can maintain their connection with each other. But the advantages of seeding new groups from the original ones could provide intrinsic motivation for new groups to form and protect the existing groups from becoming cliquish and stagnate. So, with those realizations in mind, I am, once again, persuaded that each congregation that forms Covenant Groups will have to wrestle with how to best to achieve the proliferation of new groups for the maximum benefit of all.

My experience has also convinced me of the importance of intensive training for facilitators so that they can lead the groups with maximum effectiveness. In our congregation, the training of facilitators continued with a pilot group for almost a year before our first covenant group began meeting, and we have continued to have regular meetings of the facilitators with the minister since that training has been completed, using the accepted Covenant Group format included in this chapter. The value of such meetings is for the ongoing connection and policy development of the groups and the opportunity for the minister or leader to have input into the process and/or to offer pastoral intervention if the facilitator has a difficult situation or person in his or her group. It also allows facilitators to share both their groups' successes and difficulties for the mutual benefit of all the groups. According to various authors, this facilitators' group should also be subject to the size restrictions discussed in relation to Covenant Groups and would require the same process of decision-making about how to effectively split this group into two or more.

Another topic on which there is not universal agreement is the need for each Covenant Group to perform some sort of service for the congregation or the larger community. Some leaders, particularly Thandeka, believe that this element is vital for the success of Covenant Groups.<sup>11</sup> Their feeling is that sharing a project of some sort for the benefit of others provides a sense of cohesion that cannot be achieved in any other way and that such social action is an expression of the Unitarian Universalist principles and values of caring for the world. My concern, although I am fervently in favor of social action, is that this requirement may not be one that all people would find meaningful and that such an expectation may discourage the participation of some members who could find great benefit in Covenant Groups as venues for pastoral care in a spiritual context. In the Covenant Groups at the congregation I serve, only one of the groups has chosen to participate in a service project. However, I am open to the possibility if any of the groups feel it to be important, and I will continue to encourage the possibility in all of our groups in my monthly meetings with the facilitators.

### Covenants

The name “covenant group” came into being because the originators of the concept in Unitarian Universalism believed that each group should have a set of promises or “covenants” to govern their interactions with each other, the congregation, and the community at-large. And, although these groups have taken on different names in various congregations, they have all maintained the

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<sup>11</sup> Thandeka, “Healing Community,” 31.

idea of “covenant” as a part of their common heritage. The early directive was that each group should draft its covenant at the first meeting, including the covenant to stay in the group for a specific length of time, usually at least six months. More recent thoughts by Rev. Bob Hill and Rev. Brent Smith are that, although a working covenant can be suggested by the facilitator at the first meeting, the group’s own covenant should be formulated at a later meeting, after the group has had more time to get to know each other and determine the direction in which the members want to go.<sup>12</sup>

An example of the kind of covenant that a group might develop is suggested in A Covenant Group Source Book and could include an agreement that things that are expressed in the group by someone else are not to be shared with others outside of the group, except in the previously mentioned case of a danger to the person sharing information or to others. It might also include a commitment that all members be encouraged to share their ideas, without interruption or put-downs, with a respectful audience and that anyone has the right to “pass” by not sharing at a particular time. Another agreement could be that members are to be on time to the meetings and that a specific ending time will be honored. In most groups it might also be important that there be a promise to have no “side conversations” during the session that are not a part of the general discussion and that all members pledge to take responsibility for the healthy functioning of the group. The agreement all members of the

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<sup>12</sup> Hill, 38

group will share the available time and how that would be controlled could also be an important agreement within a group.<sup>13</sup>

The idea of confidentiality is a very strong recommendation by many of the proponents of Covenant Groups in order for people to feel safe in sharing intimately within the group and is a part of the covenants suggested in the previous paragraph. However, Rev. Bob Hill writes that simply respecting a group member's privacy can have the same positive effect of confidentiality, without some of the down sides. For example, he says that if strict confidentiality is practiced, people could not share or discuss topics with those in other Covenant Groups or with members of their families and close friends, seriously limiting the positive effects of Covenant Groups for the congregation as a whole. In addition, he sees the difficulty of maintaining this pledge when new members are coming into the group and others are leaving and when facilitators need to share information with other facilitators.<sup>14</sup> And, while I can see his point, most church communities are small enough that protecting a person's anonymity would be very difficult, if not impossible; and facilitators can share information with each other within the confidentiality of the facilitators group. Therefore, I encourage Covenant Groups in our congregation to practice strict confidentiality to avoid any breaches of privacy, recognizing that even when all agree, someone may inadvertently share a confidence and cause serious emotional injury, calling for the necessity of pastoral intervention.

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<sup>13</sup> Thandeka et al., A Covenant Group Source Book, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Hill, 52 – 53.

### Models of Covenant Groups

There are at least four different models of Covenant Groups in Unitarian Universalist congregations and many more variations within those models. The four named types of small group ministry are: the Curriculum-Directed Model, the Ministry-Directed Model, the Theology-Directed Model, and the Interest-Directed Model. The Curriculum-Directed model, called Roots and Branches and developed by Rev. Brent Smith at All Souls Unitarian Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma, begins with four didactic sessions on the history and heritage of Unitarian Universalism and the local congregation (roots) and then allows members who choose to continue and to decide on their own topics for future discussion in their groups (branches).<sup>15</sup> The Ministry-Directed Augusta Model, called Small Group Ministries and developed by Rev. Calvin Dame from Augusta, Maine, gives the minister a great deal more control over the facilitators, the topics, and those who are assigned to each group.<sup>16</sup> The Theology-Directed model, developed by Meadville Lombard professor Thandeka, has much more emphasis on spiritual depth and community activism.<sup>17</sup> Finally, in the Interest-Directed model, developed by Rev. James Robinson in Brewster, Massachusetts, each group decides on a common focus such as parenting, movies, hiking, grief and loss, or some other interest.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Hill, 58 – 59.

<sup>16</sup> Hill, 60 – 61.

<sup>17</sup> Hill, 64 – 65.

<sup>18</sup> Hill, 65 – 66.

Even with these different models, however, Hill writes that the facilitator shares a common role in all of the types of Covenant Groups. That function includes getting others to participate, starting and ending the meetings on time, asking provocative questions, discouraging advice-giving, being responsible for maintaining the group's covenant, being sure that the group stays on the topic, and other duties.<sup>19</sup>

Another common element in all of these models is that they include the following basic elements for each meeting, even though the words that are used to introduce them may be slightly different. An example of this format is below.

OPENING READING and Chalice Lighting words are taken from a Unitarian Universalist source.

SINGING (may be included but is optional, based on the preference of the facilitator and the group)

OPENING CHECK-IN: Each person is asked to briefly state her or his answer to a question such as: "What things happened in your life that made you happy today?" or "What do you need to forget for awhile in order to be completely here?"

THE FOCUS/PURPOSE OF THE MEETING: The topic for discussion or activity of the meeting is intended to promote deep sharing and mutual support and should be consistent with the Unitarian Universalist Principles, included in chapter 2 of this paper, and the statement of purpose of the sponsoring congregation.

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<sup>19</sup> Hill, 32 – 34.



**CLOSING CHECK-OUT:** The facilitator encourages each person in the group to share briefly how she or he is feeling with regard to the meeting, his or her own experience, and a hope for the future of the group.

**SINGING** (optional)

**CLOSING READING:** The meeting is closed with another reading from a Unitarian Universalist source and the extinguishing of the chalice.<sup>20</sup>

An example of a Covenant Group meeting, taken from the work of Rev. Calvin Dame and the UU Community Church in Augusta, Maine, follows and shows slight differences in wording from the format above, but the same basic elements. This sample Covenant Group session is on the topic of "Shadow."

**OPENING PRAYER:** "Spirit of life and love, that lives in us and all people, be present with us this day. Help us to be grateful for all that we have, grateful for this time of connection, grateful for these friends, and for all who enrich our lives. Spirit of life, be present with us as compassion, that we may open our hearts, listen with care, and be truly present with one another. Spirit of life, be present with us as generosity of spirit, that we may meet the world with good will. Be present with us as vision, so that we may see beyond this moment and beyond the limits of our own day-to-day concerns and remember, once again, that we are a part of the larger world and all that lives therein." - Calvin Dame

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<sup>20</sup> Hill, xv.

### CHECK-IN/SHARING

TOPIC/ACTIVITY: Jungian Psychology suggests that we all learn to relegate parts of ourselves into our “shadows,” that is, psychologically out of sight and mind. This may include anything we learned growing up that was not acceptable: sexuality, aggression, fear, kindness, ambition, artistic ability, exuberance. Jung felt there was great power in the shadow. Unacknowledged needs can skew our behavior, repressing healthy aspects of our personalities and diminishing the scope of our lives and our capacity to live joyfully. This explanation is oversimplified, of course; but here are some shadow questions:

1. What would be most upsetting to hear if it were being said about you?
2. What do you think you carry in your shadow?
3. What influences helped to shape your shadow?
4. What lessons from the shadow have you learned about yourself over the years?

LIKES AND WISHES (checkout – an opportunity for group members to share what elements of the process have been most meaningful for them and what they might hope for in future meeting)

CLOSING PRAYER: “As we leave this place and this company, may the fellowship of this circle carry us forward, remind us of that which we hold to be

most sacred, and encourage us in every hour, until such time as we meet again.” - Calvin Dame <sup>21</sup>

Each element of the format above has a specific and unique purpose in the functioning of a Covenant Group.

For example, the Opening Reading/ Chalice Lighting sets a tone and establishes that this meeting is different from just an ordinary discussion group. The lighting of the flame in a chalice, a symbol of Unitarian Universalism today, is a way of defining this time and place as sacred, relational, and dedicated to our Unitarian Universalist community.

Singing, if it is used, engages the group in a shared moment in which all members of the group participate together.

The Check-in allows each person to share where they are in relation to their lives outside the group so that those in the group can know where the person is coming from and so that, after sharing, he or she can then try to be fully present to the group during its time together.

The Focus/ Purpose of the meeting should be a discussion where everyone is encouraged to participate and during which everyone feels safe to share his or her thoughts and feelings about the topic. This is the “meat” of the meeting; and it will, hopefully, give all of those present a chance for interactive sharing and ministry with each other.

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<sup>21</sup> Calvin Dame, The Augusta, Maine Small Group Ministry Session Book (Augusta, Me.: Unitarian Universalist Community Church, 2003), 25.

The Closing/Checkout allows people to express the way in which they have experienced their time together and to give them a bridge to reenter the world outside. If the meeting has been effective, something special will have happened, something that will have changed the participants and strengthened their bonds with each other and the larger religious community.

Finally, the Closing Reading sets the end of the meeting and can give members of the group inspiration for the time until their next meeting.

#### Experience at the Conejo Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

The plan for Covenant Groups in our congregation, started over two years ago, is a continuing work in progress. I am heartened by the ideas of Rev. Glenn Turner, who writes that he thinks the success of what he calls "Small Group Ministry" will be in the way each church adapts it to their own unique needs and takes ownership of the process. He also believes that Small Group Ministry should be "a focus for the entire congregation with an outreach program and a vision to help extend the ministry of the congregation."<sup>22</sup>

With that idea in mind, I would like to share the following article that I wrote for our June 2002 Newsletter, as a way of introducing the concept of Covenant Groups to the congregation that I serve. It is my hope that the experience I am sharing can serve as an inspiration for those in other growing congregations to create Covenant Groups as at least one method of providing pastoral care in their faith communities.

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<sup>22</sup> Turner, 2 – 3.

### Ministerial Musings

There has been a lot of talk recently about the formation of Covenant Groups at CVUUF. I hope that you have heard it! But it has occurred to me that maybe you have had some questions about them - so here goes!

The history of these groups is fairly new in Unitarian Universalism, but they are growing rapidly in UU congregations in Southern California and throughout the country. There have been numerous announcements, workshops, articles, e-mails, and even a website devoted to the topic. And, what's more, there are already thriving networks of Covenant Groups in our UU congregations in Goleta and Costa Mesa, as well as others in their formation stages at other congregations.

You might ask, "Why do we need Covenant Groups?" Well, one reason is that with all the growth we are experiencing, we want to be sure that we don't lose the sense of connection that has been such an important part of our congregation throughout its history. With that in mind, we would like to provide the opportunity for each person to find a place where he or she can connect with others in a closer way than what is possible on Sunday mornings.

But why Covenant Groups? After all, we have lots of other small groups in our congregation. One answer is that covenant groups are a little different in structure and purpose from most of the other groups that we have now at CVUUF. One of things that makes Covenant Groups unique is that they are limited in the number of people who participate in each group (usually between 8 and 12, with 10 being the ideal). Another difference between Covenant Groups and other types of groups at CVUUF is that they are facilitated by a leader, who is supported by a co-facilitator. And the groups are also usually devoted to a particular topic or a series of topics. Examples might be subjects such as spiritual growth, grief and loss, communication, creativity, or book study and discussion, to name a few. And, finally, membership in these groups would also require an extended commitment of time, usually one meeting a month for at least six months. So, if all of this information has piqued your curiosity, get in touch with me or one of the other people who is really excited about this concept. We would love to talk to you about it too. There is still plenty of time for you to get involved on the ground floor of this grassroots movement in our congregation.

Blessings,

Rev. Betty (signature)

From this beginning, we have continued our formation of a Covenant Group program at the Conejo Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. Covenant Groups have now been in existence in our congregation for a little over two years. We have three continuing Covenant Groups with plans to increase that number in the future as the result of Covenant Group open houses after a Sunday service several times a year to expose interested people to the idea of Covenant groups through education, a mock Covenant Group session, and the opportunity to ask questions about the process. There are three facilitators and three co-facilitators, two of each type, for the three groups. We also have two additional trained facilitators who are available to start two new groups. Each group has no more than ten members, as Hill and others suggest, and meet at least once a month in someone's home. They have trained facilitators, a regular format, a covenant of how they will relate to each other, a topic chosen by the group for discussion, and openness to new members.<sup>23</sup>

The facilitators and co-facilitators meet monthly with the minister to discuss issues that have arisen in their groups and to fine-tune their skills by leading the facilitator's group in a practice covenant group meeting with suggestions and critique from participants. Each of these meetings includes a chalice lighting and opening reading, a brief check-in, discussion of a particular topic, an evaluation of the session, a check-out, and a closing reading, with various members of the group acting as facilitators for this group.

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<sup>23</sup> Hill, 104.

Since the initial inspiration for Covenant Groups began in Unitarian Universalist congregations about seven years ago, a number of new resources have become available. The ones that our groups have found to be most valuable are Robert Hill's Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry: Saving the World Ten at a Time and Calvin Dame's An Updated Small Group Ministry Resource Book, and The Augusta, Maine Small Group Ministry Session Book. In addition The Covenant Group Source Book from The Center For Community Values has given a somewhat greater emphasis to the spiritual dimension of the groups than the other resources. All of these books are listed in the bibliography of this document and would be good starting points for someone wanting to start covenant groups in his or her congregation.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Additional Models for Effective Pastoral Care and Counseling – Lay Ministry and Neighborhood Networks**

Support for Covenant Groups as a means of pastoral care can also be enhanced in a congregation by both Lay Ministry and Neighborhood Networks. Lay Ministry, although its scope encompasses other areas in addition to pastoral care, is a significant element of a comprehensive pastoral care program. Neighborhood Networks interface with both Covenant Groups and Lay Ministry to provide for the physical, social, and spiritual needs of congregants.

#### Lay Ministry

Lay Ministry is a concept that is ideally suited for providing pastoral care, as well as other services, in a “program size” congregation. Especially when a congregation gets to a size where the minister cannot take care of all the needs of the members, friends, and families who are connected to the church, it is vital that the minister find support for the many services that the congregation needs to provide, including the pastoral care that is crucial to the wellbeing of a faith community. However, to my knowledge, there is no other comprehensive Lay Ministry program at any of the other “program size” churches in our district, perhaps because of the extended time commitment necessary for the training of these Lay Ministers by the minister or other supervisor and for the Lay Ministry candidates themselves.

The Lay Ministry program has been a part of Conejo Valley congregation for almost six years and now includes a group of seven fully trained Lay



Ministers who have participated in a three-year training program and three Lay Ministry candidates who are completing their third year of training. At the beginning of the next church year in September 2005, another group of candidates will begin their training.

Although Lay Ministers are trained in all aspects of ministry, the area in which most of the first group of Lay Ministers participate is in pastoral care as Covenant Group facilitators or as individual lay pastoral care providers. From the responses to the pastoral care and counseling questionnaire described earlier in this project, it is clear that the Lay Ministers are seen by the congregation as trusted pastoral care providers. In addition, one of the Lay Ministers is the lay leader in charge of the Neighborhood Network program, another pastoral care source.

#### Lay Ministry Training

The training curriculum that is used by the Lay Ministry group in our congregation is one that was developed by the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta, Georgia, with financial support from the Fund for Unitarian Universalism and the endorsement of the Board of Trustees of that congregation. The curriculum includes an extensive chapter on pastoral care with a great deal of practical material that is outlined in this chapter. It begins with a definition of pastoral care as a way of being with and supporting those in the church community with compassionate listening, genuine caring, and

awareness of individual needs in ways that inspire trust and spiritual growth.<sup>1</sup>

Further, the introductory paragraph says, “the skills of pastoral care can be learned but that (a lay minister) must already possess and bring the capacity for caring.”<sup>2</sup>

The next section of the curriculum encourages the lay ministry candidates to evaluate their abilities to determine if lay ministry is the right path for them. Questions that the candidates should ask themselves involve the experiences they have had that they believe have prepared them for a ministry of caring, their ability for self-care, their ability to encourage spiritual growth and healing in others, and the ways in which they are able to energize themselves for the tasks they will face.<sup>3</sup>

The third section of the chapter relates to supervision and its importance for the training and functioning of lay ministry. In this part of the curriculum, laity are advised that they should not try to act as counselors without having had professional training and that the minister or lay ministry supervisor will be responsible for such counseling or make referrals to a mental health care professional. Because the minister or supervisor is responsible for all the pastoral care activities of the lay ministers, careful training is vital until the supervisor is confident that the lay minister can perform his or her role effectively. After that, the minister or other leader will continue supervision as long as the lay minister is providing pastoral care. The curriculum also makes it

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<sup>1</sup> Stringer et al., 141

<sup>2</sup> Stringer et al., 141.

<sup>3</sup> Stringer et al., 142.

very clear that pastoral care and pastoral counseling are not the same thing and that pastoral counseling should not be entrusted to anyone who is untrained.<sup>4</sup>

Section four of the curriculum outlines the ways in which a lay minister develops trust and pledges confidentiality, with certain limited exceptions. The lay minister must make it clear that she or he will have to break confidentiality by sharing information with the minister, who is a mandated reporter, if there is any suspicion that the person with whom she or he is talking intends to do harm to himself or others, if the person confides some unlawful act in which he or she is planning to participate, or if the person is under 18 and discloses anything that involves drug or alcohol use or that the lay minister considers harmful to that person or others. All of these precautions, are, of course, for the protection of the lay minister, the minister, and the congregation and are vital for a lay ministry program.<sup>5</sup>

The next section of the curriculum establishes the importance of following the guidelines of reliability and professional behavior in the fulfillment of a lay minister's role and, once again, reminds him or her to act with awareness of the limitations on his or her time and training. It also makes very explicit the fact that a pastoral caregiver must have clear boundaries against providing pastoral care to someone with whom they are related by birth or marriage or with whom they are romantically involved. The curriculum also makes very clear the ethical

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<sup>4</sup> Stringer et al., 143.

<sup>5</sup> Stringer et al., 144 –45.

restrictions around beginning a romantic or sexual relationship with anyone with whom the lay minister may be providing care.<sup>6</sup>

Section six of the curriculum outlines a guide for compassionate listening. Included are things such as establishing a comfortable time and place for the caregiver and the person to whom he or she is listening, maintaining eye contact, setting a time limitation, keeping focus on the other person, listening for the emotion beneath the words, being present to the other person, asking sincere questions, avoiding advice-giving or solutions, sharing your own experience only when it will be helpful, avoiding judgements, being comfortable with silences, and being aware of the physical and psychological needs of the other person.<sup>7</sup>

The next section of the curriculum provides a needs-assessment to help a lay pastoral counselor to evaluate what is going on in a given situation. It includes such things as a person's need for information, for safety and security, for meaning, for avoidance and denial, for bargaining or placation, for crying, for expressing anger, for feeling guilty and responsible, for regression, for assuming control, for family and community, for solitude, for acceptance, or for physical support.<sup>8</sup>

Section eight of this pastoral care curriculum provides an extensive list of caregiving methods related to the importance for the lay pastoral caregiver to listen attentively and to show the careseeker that she or he cares. There are

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<sup>6</sup> Stringer et al., 145 – 46,

<sup>7</sup> Stringer et al., 146 – 48.

<sup>8</sup> Stringer et al., 149 – 50.

many specific ways in which that can be done, but the bottom line is to take care of two basic things in order to support another person physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Those things, according to this curriculum, are the “responsibility to listen well and to communicate that we care.”<sup>9</sup>

The succeeding section in the curriculum gives information to help the lay minister know when he or she should refer a person to the minister or other professional. There are a number of specific examples given, but the underlying premise in all of them is that a lay minister should make a referral whenever she or he is faced with a situation that that person recognizes she or he cannot handle either because of lack of expertise or the severity of the problem.

A specific example of a situation in which the lay minister must make a referral is addressed in the section of the training manual called “Assessing and Responding to Threatened Suicide.” Because of the seriousness of the problem and the difficulty of diagnosis, the lay minister is cautioned to make a referral at any time he or she believes there is even the possibility of danger because of depression, hopelessness, suicidal thoughts or plans, access to weapons or other means of attempting this act, previous attempts, a belief that suicide would solve a problem or gain attention, or the fact that the person appears to be feeling less depressed and more able to fulfill their wish to kill themselves. The authors admit that not all of these signs guarantee that suicide will be attempted,

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<sup>9</sup> Stringer et al., 150 – 53.

but they warn a lay minister to be vigilant rather than assuming that things will pass without a suicidal incident.<sup>10</sup>

The last section of this curriculum is concerned with promoting spiritual growth and healing. In it lay ministers are encouraged to look at their own spiritual journeys through the various stages of their lives and to find ways in which to enhance connection to whatever they see as holy in their lives. The purpose of this section, which is actually a part of the entire lay ministry program, is to provide support for lay ministers as they continue their healing work in the congregation.<sup>11</sup>

#### Lay Ministry at the Conejo Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

The way in which someone becomes a Lay Ministry candidate at the Conejo Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship is to speak with the minister and attend an orientation meeting. If, after those meetings, both the minister and the potential candidate agree that the individual has the qualities of a person who is attentive and caring to others, committed to the three year training program, and open to learning about all the facets of lay ministry, the ministry candidate begins the program and signs the covenant agreement below. If, on the other hand, the minister or supervisor does not think that the potential candidate will be able to fulfill the expectations of the Lay Ministry program, she or he will be counseled against entering the program. The minister or supervisor may also

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<sup>10</sup> Stringer et al., 154 – 56.

<sup>11</sup> Stringer et al., 156 – 59.

counsel the candidate to leave the program if it becomes clear the person is not doing well in the program – something that has happened in our program.

### CVUUF Lay Ministry Covenant (Revised 2003)

#### Statement of Purpose

We, the Lay Ministry Team, duly approved by the CVUUF Board, give full assent to this covenant as a statement of both our serious intent and an expression of our common concerns and loyalties.

#### To Myself

- I commit myself to an honest and responsible performance of my duties as a Lay Minister in support of the professional minister and the congregation.
- Because the religious life is an ever-growing life, I will strive to keep my own religious growth alive.
- I will try to be aware of my own strengths and weaknesses and to be open to feedback from others who are sharing their truth in love.
- Knowing my own limitations, I will seek help in difficulty.
- I will sustain respect for the Lay Ministry in my own mind.
- I will refrain from words and actions that degrade the Lay Ministry or are destructive to congregational life.

#### To My Colleagues

- I will be respectful of my colleagues and do my best to keep an open mind and heart in supporting both the current Lay Ministers and those

in training.

- I will respect confidences given to me by my colleagues.
- I will not speak scornfully or in derogation of any colleague.
- If critical of a colleague, I will speak responsibly, temperately, and constructively to him or her.
- I will work in cooperation and consultation with team members in accordance with clearly defined expectations – including, but not limited to, placing a priority on regular attendance at all Lay Ministry activities on time and well prepared.

#### To My Community

- I will hold a single standard of respect and support for all members of the congregation and the larger community.
- I will respect the confidentiality of private communications made to me, within the limits of the law, sharing critical information with the professional minister when necessary.
- I will not invade the private and intimate bonds of others' lives, nor will I trespass on those bonds for my own advantage.
- I will not exploit the needs of others for my own purposes.
- I will strive to live and speak in a way that exemplifies the best of Unitarian Universalist traditions.

Lay Minister \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



The document above was created by the Lay Ministry group of the Conejo Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, based on a model created by the Monte Vista UU Congregation in Montclair, California.

### Positive Effects of Lay Ministry in a Growing Congregation

During the last five years, the Lay Ministry members have been an active part of the pastoral care program of the Conejo Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship and have been very supportive in their relationship with and assistance to the minister. The minister leads the training of the Lay Ministers and meets with both the trained Lay Ministers and the Lay Ministry candidates once a month in separate meetings in order to take care of any issue that might arise. The minister is also in telephone and e-mail contact with the groups and individuals between meetings for supervision and pastoral care assignments. Additional reading assignments and other programs are also a part of the training and continue after Lay Ministers have been officially inducted by the congregation. Both inducted Lay Ministers and Lay Ministry Candidates also hold retreats for special enrichment at least yearly.

Lay Ministers perform a variety of functions in the Conejo Valley UU Fellowship. They participate in various rites of passage, worship services, and interfaith gatherings; lead religious education classes; attend various denominational events for additional training; facilitate workshops for those in other congregations, and join in social action projects. However, their work in pastoral care provides the most extensive benefit to the congregation and the

minister of the Conejo Valley UU Fellowship. As the minister of this “program size” congregation, I can absolutely say that I could never provide for the pastoral care and counseling needs in our church without the support of these dedicated laypeople. Those who believe that the laity should not provide pastoral care in a congregation must not have experienced the benefits that such a program can provide. It is my hope that those in other growing congregations will find the same kind of support through their own development of a similar program of pastoral care.

### Neighborhood Network

Yet another shared ministry model for providing effective pastoral care is the Neighborhood Network. Two of the “program size” congregations in the Pacific South West District sample that I interviewed have some sort of regional plan for providing pastoral care, but neither of those churches has a program that is designed to cover the entire congregation. However, my experience leads me to the conclusion that a program that is regionally organized must be much larger in scope once a congregation reaches “program size.” I am convinced that the minister and a small group of caregivers simply cannot cover all the pastoral care and counseling needs of a church that has grown to over 150 people attending Sunday services from a large geographical area.

### The Neighborhood Network Formation at CVUUF

With the importance of making connections with all the people in a growing congregation, another form of pastoral care that has been developed at

the Conejo Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship is through the Neighborhood Network. There are ten groups that have been in place for over a year and are organized regionally under the supervision of regional network chairs and an overall chairperson who is one of the Lay Ministers.

These regional groups have a variety of functions. They organize social gatherings such as potlucks, game nights, picnics, and other events on a regular basis for the purpose of providing outreach within the church community in a neighborhood setting. These events are usually held in the homes of members but sometimes involve meeting at another site for a shared activity.

In addition, these groups provide for the physical support needs of those in their neighborhood group with meals, transportation, childcare and other services. The minister or someone else in the congregation gets in touch with the Neighborhood chair who then arranges for these services.

The third function of these groups is to provide pastoral care in the form of visits, telephone and personal contact, sympathetic listening, and other types of emotional support to be provided by the lay ministers. The chairs of these groups also stay in touch with the minister and give her information about those in the group who may need more extensive pastoral care or counseling.

The minister is in regular contact with the Lay Minister who is in charge of the program, and the minister has led two training events for the Neighborhood Network chairs in the last six months. There are also plans for future trainings by

the minister and other professionals. The agenda below is an example of one of the training sessions that the minister has conducted.

Agenda for Neighborhood Network Meeting –  
November 16, 2004

Chalice Lighting and Opening Words

Check – In and Sharing of a positive experience of pastoral care you have had personally

Functions of the Neighborhood Network

Social - Community Building - methods

Physical Support in Times of Need – experiences?

Pastoral Care and Counseling – sharing of questionnaire used in this project and found in Appendix A of this document

Some Methods to be used:

Welcoming New Members – how?

Gatherings at Least Quarterly – success?

Forms to be held by the chair – results?

Telephone Tree (or other methods) for Special Needs

Name Tag Identification for Sunday Services – follow-up

Visiting or calling those who are not connected (list)

Communication with the Minister or Lay Ministers (during Betty's sabbatical)

Others?

What Support do you need for your efforts?

Check Out and Hopes

Closing

### Neighborhood Network Survey

A survey called the "Neighborhood Network Volunteer Survey," included in Appendix C of this project, is provided to the chairs of the Neighborhood Network in order to help them recruit volunteers to provide services to those in their Neighborhood group. Included in the survey are things such as contact information about the volunteer and potential opportunities for service for such things as transportation, home or hospital visits, cards or phone calls, food, childcare, or other services. This form gives the chair a source of care providers when the need arises in his or her neighborhood. At this time, we have ten Neighborhood Network groups at the Conejo Valley UU Fellowship, and this survey has been a valuable tool for these groups.

Identification of each Neighborhood Group is enhanced by placing a dot of their group color on each person's nametag, worn at Sunday services, so that those in the same neighborhood group can recognize their connection. A recent event, called "Dot Sunday," was held after a church worship service so that groups could get together to plan future activities. The plan is for these "Dot Sundays" to be held once a quarter after the service in order to continue the connections that have been made and to make new ones.

The Neighborhood Network seems to be working very well in most of the neighborhood groups, with some groups being more active in terms of their social activities than others. In times of crisis or physical need such as food provision, transportation, childcare, and contact with the minister, these groups

seem to be doing very well. Because these groups are the most recent of the forms of pastoral care in the congregation I am serving, they will continue to develop in their effectiveness; but I have already seen their value in lightening my pastoral care load. And, as the minister of this congregation, I am committed to the supporting the continued success of this valuable form of pastoral care.

Shared ministry through Covenant Groups, Lay Ministry, and Neighborhood Networks provides a valuable resource to both the professional minister, who is the supervisor of these groups, and the congregation. Covenant Groups greatly enhance the spiritual and relational health of the congregation and the pastoral care and counseling component of the congregation as well. At the Conejo Valley congregation that I serve, the fact that the majority of the facilitators and co-facilitators of Covenant Groups are also Lay Ministers has augmented their ability to provide pastoral care to a larger segment of the congregation as well. The result is that I have more opportunities to work in depth with these pastoral caregivers, to devote a greater amount of time to the more serious counseling needs of those in the congregation, and to receive a larger number of referrals than I could without these programs. I am energized by the success and interaction of these types of shared ministry in our congregation and convinced that pastoral care has reached a much deeper level than would be possible with only the minister to provide it. I look forward to the ongoing development of these vital resources in the congregation I serve and

encourage other ministers and laypeople to share the positive impact of all these programs.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Closing Thoughts**

Providing effective pastoral care and counseling in a growing congregation is a daunting task if a minister believes that she or he must face this vital responsibility alone or with a small group of untrained helpers. On the other hand, it is my belief that this important ministry can become eminently manageable if it is shared with others who have been trained to undertake a shared ministry of pastoral care. In addition, when a congregation reaches “program size,” I am convinced, supported by the information in this project, that a shared ministry program of pastoral care becomes a necessity rather than a luxury unless that congregation can afford to hire a large number of staff members to accomplish the job.

Certainly developing a shared ministry of pastoral care and counseling for a Unitarian Universalist, or any other, congregation is fraught with both ethical and logistical challenges. But I believe that such a program, whether it uses the specific models of Covenant Groups, Lay Ministry, and the Neighborhood Network described in this project or not, is critical for the health and wellbeing of a “program size” congregation. If the minister fails to recognize the importance of such a plan, she or he may well be faced with an insurmountable task – one that could cause untold damage to both the minister and the congregation.

The experience that I had in collecting data about pastoral care and counseling in the congregation I serve and doing personal interviews with ministers of “program size” churches proved extremely valuable for me. I was



able to see innovative and very successful programs that could be adapted to other congregations, including my own. It is for that reason, as well as others that I hope other ministers will take advantage of opportunities to do in-depth sharing with colleagues on the topic of pastoral care and counseling so that they might gain some of the same insights that I was able to acquire. I am sure that their pastoral care programs will be enhanced as a result.

In addition, I recommend that ministers of other growing congregations, particularly those of “program size,” use a questionnaire similar to the one that I have used with my congregation in order to evaluate the effectiveness of their pastoral care programs. It is something that I intend to do regularly from now on. With that idea in mind, I have included that instrument in Appendix A of this project so that others could use and adapt it to their own needs. She or he might also find value in keeping track of the number of hours spent in pastoral care and counseling duties each week and comparing that number to the number of those who attend on Sunday morning. Such a comparison could be able to prevent difficulties for both the minister and the congregation.

Certainly, there is a great deal more that could be written about this topic, and I expect to continue my exploration of this subject. Future research that I think valuable would be to extend the range of this study to the next larger size congregation, described by Rothauge as “corporation”<sup>1</sup> and Mann as “corporate.”<sup>2</sup> If the ministers of “program size” churches are having difficulty

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<sup>1</sup> Rothauge, 31.

<sup>2</sup> Mann, In-Between Church, 18.

keeping up with their pastoral care needs of the congregations they serve, the pressure on “corporate size” church ministers must be enormous. Possibly they could share some of their methods with those of us who are not there yet.

This project has been an enormous opportunity for growth for me. I am even more firmly convinced that shared ministry is vital for an effective pastoral care program in a “program size” church than I was when I began my research, and I hope that my findings will be helpful to those who read this document.

With that concern in mind, I would like to conclude by sharing the following meditation, written by the Reverend Doctor Gordon B. McKeeman and titled “Ministry is All That We Do – Together.” I believe that it encapsulates my hope for the shared ministry of pastoral care and counseling that I have described in this project and that I hope to share with others.

Ministry is all that we do - together.  
Ministry is that quality of being in community  
That affirms human dignity,  
Beckons forth hidden possibilities,  
Invites us into deeper, more constant,  
Reverent relationships,  
And carries forward  
Our heritage of hope and liberation.

Ministry is what we do together  
As we celebrate triumphs of our human spirit  
Miracles of birth and life  
Wonders of devotion and sacrifice.

Ministry is what we do together -  
With one another,  
In terror and torment  
In grief, in misery and pain  
Enabling us in the presence of death  
To say yes to life.

We who minister speak  
And live the best we know  
With full knowledge  
That it is never quite enough  
And yet are reassured  
By lostness found  
Fragments reunited  
Wounds healed  
And joy shared.

Ministry is what we all do - together.<sup>3</sup>

Amen and Namaste

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<sup>3</sup> Grateful acknowledgment is made for permission to reprint "Ministry is All That We Do - Together" by Gordon McKeeman in Awakened From the Forest: Meditations on Ministry, edited by Gary E. Smith © 1995 by Skinner House Books.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A - Congregational Research Tools and Information**

The questionnaire below is the one that I used in my own congregation to measure information and satisfaction with our pastoral care and counseling. It provided me with a great deal of valuable information, and I recommend its use to others.

#### **CVUUF Pastoral Care Questions**

(Personal information will be kept confidential.)

1. Name of person interviewed (or anonymous): (I would recommend at least gender here.)
2. Age of person interviewed:
3. How long have you been a Unitarian Universalist?
4. How long have you been a member or friend of this congregation?
5. How often in each month do you attend Sunday services?
6. What other congregational activities do you participate in regularly?
7. What types of personal support or Pastoral Care are you aware of at CVUUF?
8. How did you find out about these opportunities?
9. What other ways would you suggest that Pastoral Care opportunities could be publicized?
10. Have you ever had experience with any of the types of Pastoral Care at CVUUF?
11. If so, which one(s)?
12. How effective did you find each of them to be? Why or why not?
13. Have you known anyone else in the congregation who has had experience with any of these types of Pastoral Care?

14. Did they share their experience with you? If so, what did they tell you about it?

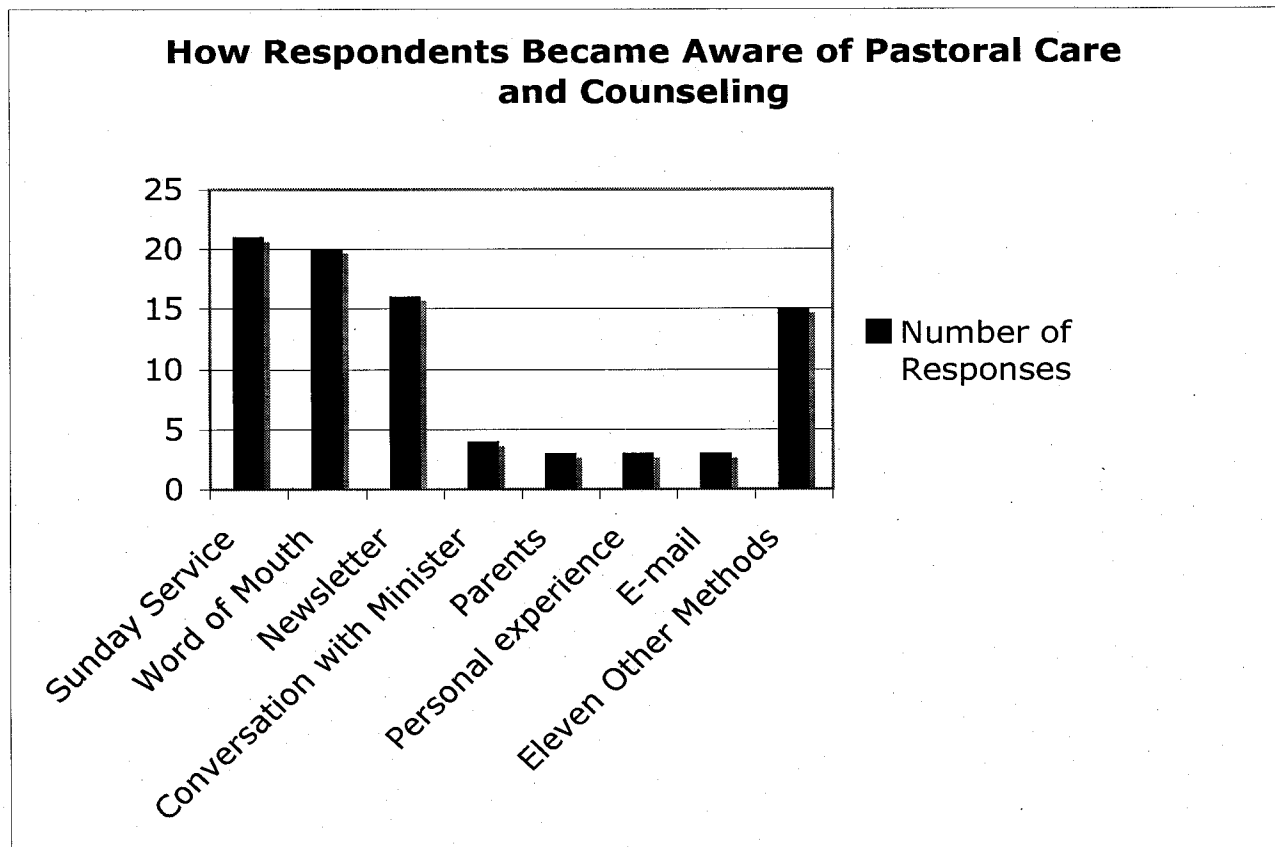
15. What other types of Pastoral Care would you find helpful in our congregation? Why?

16. Do you have any additional comments that you would like to share at this time?

Name of the interviewer \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

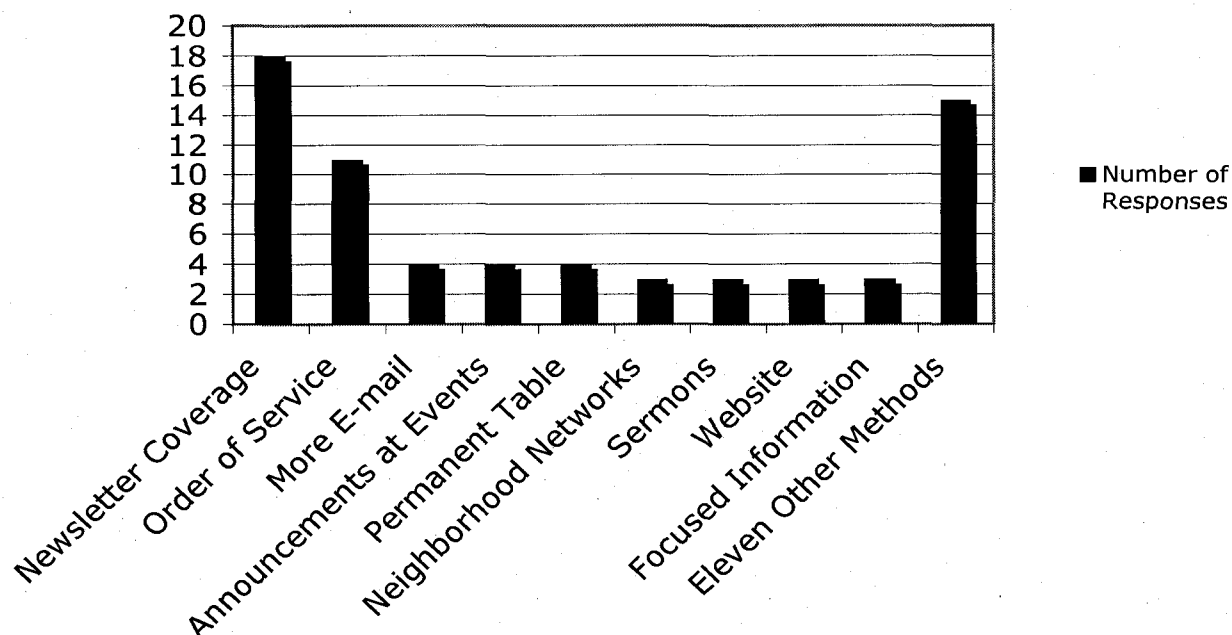
### **Appendix B – Results From Congregational Questionnaire**

The survey information in the graph below suggests ways pastoral care and counseling programs are now being publicized.



The survey information captured in the graph below indicates other ways in which congregants suggested publicizing pastoral care and counseling opportunities.

## Respondents' Recommended Ways To Increase Awareness of Pastoral Care and Counseling



The survey information below comprises the eleven additional ways from the graph above that were suggested for increasing the number of ways to publicize pastoral care and counseling programs in the congregation, and they could be useful in instituting or expanding a program. They are listed in order according to the numbers of people who suggested them.

- More small support groups for specific concerns - 4
- Engaging members who disappear - 2
- Lay ministers who are trained could be on call - list of those available if minister is not or is not appropriate - Lay Ministers more active - 3
- Calls and visits in crisis - 2

All of the methods below had only one response. (alphabetical order)

- Alzheimer's Support Group
- Pastoral care and counseling for children – minister to go to children's  
RE classes to create a relationship
- Financial advice, scholarship information, UU scholarship
- Get-well cards should be sent.
- Getting more people involved
- Go back to Caring Network with help by Lay Ministers
- Grief class should be offered.
- Holiday and other party possibilities for the homeless (outreach)
- Hospice training for Lay Ministers and others
- Mentoring programs for teens, young adults, and the elderly
- More one-on-one counseling
- Increased response/awareness of illness and stress is needed.
- Neighborhood Group to be sure that people are supported
- Neighborhood groups should tell people that food has already been  
arranged for them.
- Neighborhood [Caring Committee] needs more help.
- Onsite phone availability
- Parent's Support Group
- Prayer/meditation circle by a group of people to support others
- Publicize availability of PC and C to teens (confidential)



- Referrals to helping agencies or people
- YRUU as “peer pastoral counseling” is working (but don’ call it that)
- Will call when needed

The comments below are ideas from the last item on the questionnaire; they might have some value as ideas for the congregation to use.

#### 16. Other comments?

- Appreciates minister’s commitment and accessibility
- Believe that you get what you give; and if you give what you can, you will receive what you need.
- Childcare is needed for more events.
- Do Covenant Group leaders get training?
- Don’t over-promote PC and C - minister cannot do it all.
- Has found our church a welcoming, supportive, and generous place
- Fellowship is supportive and responsive if there is a need.
- Great that minister does visits.
- Group interaction is good, but it doesn’t get the level of intimacy that one-on-one interaction does.
- How is a Covenant Group different from a Community Group?
- I am grateful for this caring community and our minister.
- Lay Ministers could use more men.
- Lay ministers’ role in Pastoral Care needs to be made clear.

- Neighborhood Network could be improved w/ groups blended if one is not working - not all are working well.
- Need a sense of reciprocity - all helping each other, not just receiving
- Need a place to get answers for biblical and religious questions
- Pastoral Care and Counseling is a great idea.
- Very positive ministry - lay and professional
- Printed explanation of what Pastoral Care is and what is offered at

#### CVUUF

- Reminding people about PC and C through name badges
- Return of circle dinners is needed.
- Thinks they do a great job
- Therapy needs a trained person.
- Thrilled w/ our church
- This congregation is so outgoing and supportive.
- We do Pastoral Care and Counseling well.

### **Appendix C – Survey for Neighborhood Network Chairs**

The survey below has been designed for Neighborhood Network chairs to find out what volunteers are willing and able to do to provide service for others in their geographical area, but it could also be used by the larger church community if a centralized plan were to be put in place for a pastoral sized congregation.

#### **Neighborhood Network Volunteer Survey**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

First

Last (please print)

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Street

City

Zip

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ (home) \_\_\_\_\_ (work)

\_\_\_\_\_ (cell)

Best time to call \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Ways to help:

Transportation to:

Doctors \_\_\_\_\_ church \_\_\_\_\_ appointments \_\_\_\_\_ any \_\_\_\_\_

Home Visits \_\_\_\_\_

Hospital Visits \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Contact \_\_\_\_\_

Shopping \_\_\_\_\_

Child Care \_\_\_\_\_

Prepare and Deliver Food \_\_\_\_\_

Yard Work \_\_\_\_\_

Home Repair \_\_\_\_\_

Write Notes or Cards \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you so much for your willingness to support those in Our Community!

### **Appendix D – Ministerial Research Tools and Information**

The questionnaire below was used in the research for this project for interviewing the ministers in this “program size” church sample but could be adapted for larger or smaller congregations.

1. Date of interview -
2. Name of church -
3. Name of minister -
  - a. years in professional ministry?
  - b. any previous occupations?
4. Current membership number -
5. Average Sunday morning attendance (including children) -
6. How would you define Pastoral Care and Pastoral Counseling?
 

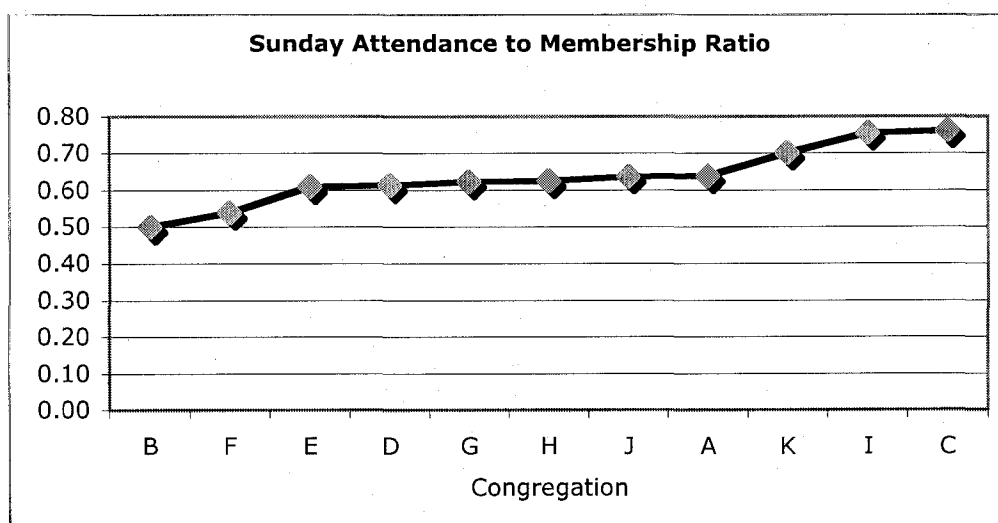
Pastoral Care -

Pastoral Counseling -
7. What are the most pressing Pastoral Care and Counseling needs in the congregation that you are serving?
8. What percentage of your time weekly (on average) is spent in providing Pastoral Care and Counseling?
9. How satisfying has that work been as a part of your ministry?
10. What frustrations have you personally experienced in providing Pastoral Care and Counseling in your present congregation?
11. What are some of the methods that you and your congregation have implemented to meet Pastoral Care and Counseling needs:
  - a. by the minister?
  - b. by lay people?

12. In your opinion, how effective have each of these methods been in meeting your congregation's Pastoral Care and Counseling needs?
13. How do you communicate to the members of your congregation that such services are available? In your opinion how effective has that communication been in making the members of the congregation aware of those opportunities?
14. What methods have you used to get people in the congregation involved in these programs as providers?
15. How have you been able to deal with the more severe cases of mental illness in your congregation? What resources are available in your community to support you in this effort?
16. Are there any other comments that you would like to share at this time?

### **Appendix E - Congregational Attendance Compared to Membership**

The graph below indicates the reported relationship between membership and Sunday morning attendance for each congregation surveyed. While it is not relevant to the study that I am doing, it does raise questions about the variability of the ratios – perhaps the opportunity for someone else's research.



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